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## Playing the Christ Card: Courting Christians through Religious Appeals in Political Campaigns

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PLAYING THE CHRIST CARD:  
COURTING CHRISTIANS THROUGH RELIGIOUS APPEALS IN  
POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

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August 2012

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## **DEDICATION**

To Mom & Dad

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(Philippians 4:13, King James Version).

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## **ABSTRACT**

In spite of a corpus of work over the last three decades acknowledging the centrality of religion in politics, (see e.g. Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wuthnow, 1988), there remains a scarcity of research examining the consequences of religious communication in political campaigns. The current study fills this void through an empirical exploration of the effects of religious campaign appeals on prospective voters. Specifically, this interdisciplinary investigation develops a theoretical framework and subsequent expectations as to how religious appeals are likely to activate individual religiosity thereby influencing the formation of political attitudes. Hypothesized expectations are then tested through a series of controlled media experiments administered to college students and a representative cross-section of U.S. adults.

Consistent with expectations, results demonstrate exposure to religious appeals activates, or “primes,” religiosity, which significantly influences individual political evaluations. Priming effects are shown to be most pronounced based on one’s religious beliefs relative to level of religious commitment or denominational affiliation. Those individuals holding more orthodox religious beliefs become significantly more likely to evaluate a candidate favorably following exposure to an appeal incorporating religious cues. At the same time, analysis demonstrates religious priming effects are attenuated in more complex information environments. Individuals exposed to additional partisan and non-partisan political information in the context of viewing religious appeals become less reliant on religiosity in forming political attitudes. Nevertheless, study findings strongly suggest religious beliefs remain a consequential consideration in the minds of potential voters regardless of information environment complexity.

Additionally, experimental results point to the ability of candidates to prime religiosity through both implicit and explicit appeals. In a novel experiment, study results illustrate that a

candidate can effectively activate the religious beliefs of viewers without formally referencing religion vis-à-vis implicit pro-life appeals and endorsement of traditional family values. Formal analysis then explores the potential for candidates to face backlash effects for mounting religious campaigns. Findings, however, suggest candidates face little adverse effects from explicitly appealing to religion. Indeed, general social acceptance of religion in the U.S. suggests candidates may appeal to religion more explicitly without fear of voter repercussions.

The study concludes with a discussion of study results and implications for political discourse as well as a call for further research into the growing and influential role of religion in modern American politics.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Faith doesn't just influence me; it really defines me. I don't wake up every day wondering what do I need to believe. Let us never sacrifice our principles for anybody's politics. Not now. Not ever. I believe life begins at conception. We believe in some things. We stand by those things. We live or die by those things. I'm Mike Huckabee, and I approve this message.

2008 Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee  
"Believe" advertisement copy<sup>1</sup>

Former Arkansas Governor and Baptist minister Mike Huckabee's words, delivered in a political advertisement that aired during his unsuccessful bid for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, are, in many ways, emblematic of the now intimate role of religion in American politics and political campaigns. The "Believe" ad extolling Huckabee's Christian beliefs through religious rhetoric and visual imagery (see Figure 1.1) was released by his campaign in November of 2008 prior to the Iowa caucus (Luo, 2007). Designed to simultaneously highlight his evangelical tradition and distinguish his values from



Figure 1.1 – Huckabee "Believe" ad

those of his rivals, the ad garnered national media attention (e.g. Luo, 2007; Parker, 2007) thereby helping Huckabee appeal to evangelicals and born-again Christians, a core voting bloc representing 60% of 2008 Iowa Republican caucus goers (Langer, 2008). Originally thought a second-tier candidate, the earned media coverage from the ad coupled with religiously-infused stump speeches allowed governor Huckabee to connect with evangelicals and propelled the relatively underfunded candidate from single digits to a commanding 10-point victory in Iowa.

The strategy of Huckabee to openly appeal to Christian voters, however, is neither new nor an isolated case, for the "Believe" ad represents but one of myriad attempts by elites in the modern American political environment to court the support of religious individuals. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> The "Believe" ad is available for viewing at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjtGgfhKIvo&feature=relmfu>.

former Empower America and White House communications staffer David Kuo (2006) describes how politicians routinely employ the strategic use of religious rhetoric to effectively communicate with and mobilize religious individuals, especially Christian evangelicals – an estimated to 10 to 40 million Americans Kuo argues comprise “the single most important political constituency in America since the height of the labor movement in the 1950s” (p. xii).

In recent years political elites have increasingly relied on religious appeals in an attempt to court Christian voters (Domke & Coe, 2008; Guth, 2004). From rather audacious attempts such as Texas Governor Rick Perry’s religious *Response*, a 30,000-person national day of prayer effectively serving to kick off his unsuccessful 2012 presidential bid, to the more mundane use of religiously-tinged broadcast advertisements, political elites have frequently embraced such appeals as a method of garnering political support. Employing the “God strategy,” Coe and Domke (2006) note American presidents since 1980 have significantly increased religious references in political speeches relative to presidents of previous decades (see also Domke & Coe, 2008). At the same time, scholars have argued many such appeals are “narrowcasted” by elites vis-à-vis the use of subtle, coded language and symbols (Calfano & Djupe, 2009; Domke & Coe, 2008). The use of such “coded” language serves as a veritable “dog whistle” (Unger, 2007) permitting politicians to simultaneously communicate with particularly religious voters without appearing overly religious, thereby minimizing potentially alienating relatively secular individuals or provoking unwanted, critical media attention (Domke & Coe, 2008; Kuo, 2006).

During the 2008 election cycle alone, many viewers likely witnessed numerous religious appeals in campaign ads, as scores of televised political ads aired by candidates across the nation contained overt religious rhetoric and symbols.<sup>2</sup> Religious campaign ads in the election cycle

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<sup>2</sup> Content analysis of all U.S. Congressional and gubernatorial ads aired during the 2008 election cycle demonstrates roughly 5% of all ads contained overt religious verbiage or imagery (C. Weber, personal conversation, March 2012).

ran the gamut, from presidential spots such as Huckabee's "Believe" commercial described above and Senator John McCain's "The One" ad linking then Senator Barack Obama to Moses



Figure 1.2 - McCain "The One" ad

parting the Red Sea (see Figure 1.2)<sup>3</sup> to Congressional spots such as Gregg Harper's "For Congress" ad, which aired in the race for Mississippi's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional district. The advertisement lauded Harper's role as "family man, deacon and Sunday school teacher" against visuals

presenting the candidate singing in a church choir bathed in sunshine pouring through ornate stained glass windows (see Figure 1.3).<sup>4</sup>

The use of such religious appeals, however, takes on greater significance in light of the centrality of religion to society and the intimate role played of



Figure 1.3 - Harper "For Congress" ad

religion in the lives of many Americans, particularly in the political realm (e.g. Gold & Russell, 2007; Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt & Green, 2006; Hammond, Shibley & Solow, 1994; Layman 2001; Layman & Carmines, 1997). From a political perspective, literature suggests religious considerations help structure individuals' political attitudes and behaviors (Green et al, 1996; Legee and Kellstedt, 1993), informing voters' evaluations of political parties (Layman, 1997, 2001), presidential performance (Olson & Warber, 2008), candidates (Domke & Coe, 2008) and issues (Frank, 2004; Layman & Carmines, 1997; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). At the same time, research into religious traditions demonstrates a marked shift away from inter-denominational

<sup>3</sup> McCain's "The One" ad is available for viewing at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mopkn0lPzM8>.

<sup>4</sup> Harper's "For Congress" ad is available for viewing at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCBxy\\_gcfmw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCBxy_gcfmw).



(i.e. between denominations) toward intra-denominational (i.e. within denominations) differences such that those embracing a more traditional or fundamentalist view of religious doctrine have gravitated toward the Republican Party, while adherents of relatively liberal religious beliefs have increasingly aligned with the Democratic Party (Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988). Indeed, scholars have demonstrated one of the most potent predictors of political behavior has been one's religious beliefs – that is, one's degree of religious traditionalism (Hammond et al., 1994; Guth et al., 2006; Layman, 2001; Olson & Warber, 2008).

The proliferation of religious appeals in elite rhetoric at a time of increased voter reliance on religion thus gives rise to important political considerations, not the least of which is the effect of such appeals on potential voters. Surprisingly, however, scant work has examined the impact and consequences of religious appeals in political discourse, especially in the context of campaign communications. Although a resurgence of scholarly work has focused on the prevalence of religion in political rhetoric and the increased prominence of religion in voter decision formation, little is known about the effect of religious appeals on potential voters. Given anecdotal, “insider” accounts suggesting such appeals are rather effective at courting Christian individuals (Kuo, 2006), and the fact research has demonstrated campaigns, and particularly political advertisements, to be consequential in terms of shaping voters' political judgments (e.g. Kahn & Kenney, 1999), the lack of attention paid the consequences of religious appeals in campaign communications is perplexing.

A rare exception in this area is the work of Calfano and Djupe (2009), which demonstrates that exposure to religious political information results in more favorable candidate evaluations among evangelical individuals. Calfano and Djupe's (2009) findings, although notable, are necessarily limited owing to a singular experimental design as well as the use of

mock candidates and stimulus materials. Moreover, the authors fail to thoroughly explicate a causal mechanism for their findings. Although Calfano and Djupe (2009) argue subtle religious statements serve as a heuristic in cueing in-group identity, it remains unclear what specific psychological process explains their findings, nor what the effects of religious appeals may be in the context of more complex information environments typical of actual political campaigns.

Research in political science, mass communication and psychology, however, provides insight that helps explain Calfano and Djupe's (2009) findings and, more importantly, serves as the foundation for a more comprehensive examination of the possible consequences of religious appeals. Prominent literature in political science and mass communication on media priming has consistently demonstrated the ability of subtle appeals in political communication to activate, or "prime," voters' attitudes, which are subsequently applied by voters in the formation of political evaluations (e.g. Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino, Hutchings & White, 2002). Mendelberg (1997, 2001), for example, has shown subtle appeals to racialized issues such as crime can activate existing racial predispositions, which subsequently influence how individuals evaluate political figures (see e.g. Valentino et al, 2002).

Applied to religious appeals, work by Weber and Thornton (2012), which is based on data included in this study, confirms that religious appeals are indeed consequential for religious individuals regarding how candidates are evaluated. As the authors demonstrate, and as detailed in this study, exposure to religious appeals primes one's religious beliefs, which subsequently influence evaluations of political candidates – an effect that is shown to vary based on the complexity of one's campaign information environment (Weber & Thornton, 2012).

Despite Weber and Thornton's (2012) findings, however, multiple questions concerning the effects of religious appeals on voters remain unanswered. It is still unclear, for example, how

effective differing types of religious appeals (i.e. implicit or explicit appeals) are as a campaign strategy or the degree to which candidates potentially risk backlash effects for employing religious advertisements. Although religion is pervasive and widely embraced in the United States (Putnam & Campbell, 2010), do candidates nonetheless risk alienating potential voters that become turned off by overt religious appeals or by media drawing attention to a candidate's use of religion for political gain? From this perspective, are more subtle, implicit religious appeals perhaps a more effective campaign strategy?

At the same time, it is unknown how political partisanship influences the effect of religious appeals, particularly as it relates to campaign environments. As political campaigns are inherently partisan events and given the strength of one's partisan predispositions to influence political behavior (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth & Weisberg, 2008), one questions how the presence of partisan political cues – a common component of political campaign ads – may influence the effectiveness of religious appeals.

In an effort to address these and other unanswered questions and given the lack of empirical research examining religious appeals more generally, this dissertation explores the consequences of religious appeals in political campaign messaging. The study specifically focuses on the consequences of religious appeals in alternative information environments as well as differences in the effectiveness of implicit and explicit religious appeals. The study additionally examines the potential for candidates employing religious appeals to suffer adverse effects from viewers exposed to media coverage critical of religion in politics. In so doing, the project fills a lacuna in the religion and politics academic literature. Much like scholars have offered comprehensive accounts of the use and consequences of emotions (Brader, 2006) and

racial appeals (Mendelberg, 2001) in political campaigns, the current study offers a more complete picture of the effects of religious appeals as a campaign strategy.

It does so by merging literature on the role of religion in politics with priming research drawn from mass communication, political science and psychology. The interdisciplinary nature of the study thus offers value to multiple academic disciplines. For religious scholars, the study examines the effects of religious appeals by differing religious dimensions thereby offering a glimpse into how appeals resonate with voters based on one's religious affiliation relative to degree of religious commitment or nature of one's religious beliefs. The study simultaneously promises practical information to campaign strategists by empirically demonstrating how and under what conditions religious appeals affect potential voters. These contributions aside, however, the study's primary benefit lies in its contribution to scholars of religion and politics, namely to advance understanding of the influential and growing role of religion in modern American political campaigns. Only through rigorous, empirical analysis of the consequences of religious appeals in campaigns can we move beyond the compelling, yet incomplete anecdotal accounts offered of the use of religion by political elites in modern American politics.

To that end, the study proceeds with a thorough interdisciplinary review of literature in Chapter 2, in the process setting forth a series of testable hypotheses, which are then summarized at the end of the chapter. Specifically, Chapter 2 opens with a review of the changing role of religion in American politics over the last half century, which is then wedded to research on media and political priming to derive how religious appeals embedded in campaign appeals are likely to influence religious voters. The discussion then transitions into how alternative information environments may influence the effectiveness of religious appeals, with particular attention paid the potential for non-partisan campaign information and partisan cues to moderate

priming effects. Drawing heavily on racial priming research, I then develop a framework how implicit and explicit religious appeals are likely to resonate with voters and conclude with a discussion of the likelihood for religious appeals to result in backlash effects for candidates.

Following a review of the literature, Chapter 3 focuses on methodological aspects of the study and describes the media experiments designed to test study hypotheses. The experiments are briefly summarized followed by a discussion of the participant samples used in study experiments. In contrast to previous research, I rely on both college student samples and a nationally-representative adult sample. Religious measures of the nationally-representative adult sample are compared to measures drawn from college student samples, with results indicating striking religious congruence between the two age groups in terms of religious traditionalism among Christian identifiers, thereby bolstering confidence in overall study findings.

Chapter 4 begins the first of four analytical chapters and focuses on priming by various religious dimensions and in low information environments. The chapter opens with a factor analysis of religious measures confirming distinct religious dimensions for religious behaviors (i.e. commitment) and beliefs (i.e. traditionalism). Results from a series of regression models are then presented. Consistent with expectations, exposure to religious appeals in a low-information environment produces significant priming effects, which are shown to be most pronounced based on one's religious beliefs. Moreover, these effects are demonstrated in a college student sample and subsequently extended to a nationally-representative cross section of U.S. adults.

The regression models presented in Chapter 4 are then expanded in Chapter 5 to explore priming effects in more complex, non-partisan information environments. As hypothesized, results indicate religious priming effects are significantly reduced when individuals are exposed to additional non-partisan candidate information prior to viewing a religious campaign appeal.

Chapter 6 then explores the effect of partisan cues on religious priming. Experimental findings suggest the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals offsets religious priming effects while simultaneously promoting partisan priming. Partisan cues effectively activate one's political predispositions resulting in viewers becoming less reliant on their religious beliefs in forming political evaluations.

Transitioning from the effect of religious appeals in alternative information environments to the consequences of different types of religious appeals, Chapter 7 explores differences between subtle, implicit appeals and overt, explicit appeals. Results demonstrate both implicit and explicit appeals to resonate among religious traditionalists with no significant difference between the two types of ads. Additional analysis reveals, however, that political sophistication significantly moderates the relationship between implicit and explicit religious appeals. Priming effects are shown to be more pronounced for political novices presented an explicit religious appeal, while implicit appeals appear to resonate with the politically attentive. Chapter 7 then returns to the effect of appeals in information environments by examining the potential for candidates to face backlash effects for being “called out” for their use of religious appeals vis-à-vis media coverage critical of elites merging religion and politics. Results, however, yield little evidence that exposure to critical messaging reduces any religious priming effect among traditionalists.

Following formal analysis, the study concludes in Chapter 8 with a review of substantive findings and discussion of study implications. The conclusion likewise offers a brief discussion of study limitations as well as avenues for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **The Role of Religion in Modern American Politics**

Religion is deeply rooted in American society (e.g. Herberg, 1955; Greeley, 1972; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wuthnow, 1988). Scholars have even termed the United States “God Land” (O’Brien, 1999) for its intimate connection to religion. In his classic on American culture, Tocqueville (1956) long ago noted the instrumental role religion plays in advancing democracy, an observation that continues to ring true today (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Although religious participation has declined modestly in recent years among the youngest Millennial generation, an overwhelming majority of Americans nonetheless demonstrate marked religious adherence (Pew, 2010; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Consider, more Americans are involved in religious organizations than in any other type of voluntary association (Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2006), with religious related involvement often more intense than participation in other voluntary organizations (Steensland et al., 2000). More than 60% of Americans report involvement in religious organizations, a greater rate than those professing involvement in a hobby, sports, arts and music combined (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Globally, Americans embrace religion at far greater rates relative to other western democracies (Murihead, Rosenblum, Schlozman & Shen, 2006).

Given the pervasiveness of religious participation in American society, it comes as little surprise religion plays a similarly pivotal role in modern politics, especially as it relates to the development of one’s political attitudes and worldviews (Green et al, 1996; Hunter, 1991; Leege & Kellstedt, 1993; Wuthnow 1988, 1989). Influential religious socialization frequently begins early in life (Carroll & Roof, 1993) with the symbols, pedagogy and practices espoused by religious organizations serving to shape one’s world and cultural views (Steensland et al, 2000).

Although overt political preaching from the pulpit is rare in most religious traditions, individuals nonetheless glean information from religious services, and especially communication with fellow congregants, that similarly shapes their socio-political beliefs (Djupe & Gilbert, 2002; Green et al, 1988; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1998; Welch et al., 1993).

Indeed, the ability of religion to influence the socio-political views of potential voters has marked implications for campaigns and elections. It is important to note, however, the role religion plays in modern American politics has fundamentally evolved over the past half century. Such a shift is readily observed in the presidential elections of 1960 and 2004. Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy enjoyed the support of more than 80% of Roman Catholics in 1960 (Silk & Walsh, 2008); yet by 2004, Senator John F. Kerry, also a Massachusetts Catholic, lost the Catholic vote (47% to 52%) to President George W. Bush, a religiously devout Protestant (Guth et al., 2006). How did such a religious transformation in American politics occur whereby self-identified Catholics would disproportionately support a devout Protestant over a Catholic?

Historical research into religion in American society and politics in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century embraced an ethnoreligious framework, revealing distinct ecumenical divisions. In his seminal work, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, Herberg (1955) noted marked tension between the three major traditions, especially between Protestants and Catholics, owing in large part to ethnic and socio-economic differences. While Catholics were largely centered in urban areas and composed of less educated, working class Irish and Italian immigrants, relatively more educated English Protestants tended to reside in rural areas with large percentages involved in agricultural-related activities. Beyond ethnic and socio-economic factors, the major religious traditions were likewise divided by suspicion and prejudices that further imposed cultural differences thereby leading to stronger in-group attachments (Wuthnow, 1988). In 1950, for example, the National



Association of Evangelicals (Protestants) passed a resolution noting its “grave concern” for the “militant and aggressive tactics of the Roman Catholic hierarchy within and upon our (the) government” (National Association of Evangelicals, 1950, p. 10, cited in Wuthnow, 1988, p. 74).

Such profound cleavages translated into distinct political views and voting preferences. While urban, working class Catholics connected to machine politics and organized labor strongly supported Democratic candidates and policies, rural, non-southern Protestants disproportionately favored Republican candidates and initiatives (Wuthnow, 1988). Indeed, voting studies of this period confirmed the rather monolithic political behavior of the religious traditions (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Berelson et al., 1954), perhaps best illustrated by the presidential election of 1960 mentioned above wherein Kennedy enjoyed the overwhelming support of Roman Catholics.

From this perspective, one’s adherence to either of the major Christian religious traditions was largely predictive of political behavior. Conceptualizing religion in terms of a Protestant-Catholic dichotomy, although simplistic, nonetheless captured the most significant religious effect on voting behavior, as non-southern Protestants primarily backed Republicans, and Catholics largely supported Democrats for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Olson & Warber, 2008). Edwards (1990) analysis of 35 years of presidential job approval data from the early 1950s through the mid 1980s demonstrates significant, remarkably stable differences between Protestants and Catholics regarding support for presidents of this period, thus illustrating the relative effectiveness of examining political behavior in terms of broad religious traditions.

### **The Counterculture Movement and the Onslaught of the Culture Wars**

The past four decades, however, have witnessed a profound religious shift toward intra-denominational differences (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988). The historical divide between Catholics and Protestants has been displaced by a growing rift within religious

denominations between those embracing more fundamentalist or “orthodox” beliefs relative to those adhering to secular or “progressive” doctrinal interpretations (Hunter, 1991; Wuthnow, 1988, 1989). This orthodox-progressive division has encouraged political battle lines drawn on a host of divisive social issues ushering in the “culture wars” (Hunter, 1991).

Scholars and pundits alike argue the shift toward intra-denominational division along a fundamentalist-progressive fault line has been driven, in large part, by the formal entry of the Christian Right into the political arena (Dione, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001, Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Thomas & Dobson, 1999). Religious groups such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family and others have fueled ongoing cultural discussions in the political arena and given prominence to religious positions on divisive social issues. Indeed, Putnam and Campbell (2010) argue the foray of the Christian Right into politics represented an “aftershock” precipitated by religious individuals’ visceral reaction to the liberalization of sexual practices and political policies during the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s, especially as it relates to the issues of abortion and the decline of longstanding, traditional sexual norms. As the Christian Right voiced conservative political positions on these and other social issues, “religiosity and conservative politics became increasingly aligned, and abortion and gay rights became emblematic of the emergent culture wars” (Putnam & Campbell, 2010, p. 120).

In political terms, the potency of religion thus transitioned away from marked ecumenical division toward the degree to which one embraces traditional religious beliefs, such as inerrancy of Biblical scripture (Layman 1997, 2001). Indeed, recent scholarly work has demonstrated marked intra-denominational differences consistent with an orthodox-progressive religious division (Abramowitz, 1995; Green, Guth & Fraser 1991; Guth et al., 2006; Layman, 2001). In contrast to one’s denominational affiliation, religious traditionalism has been shown to be a more

reliable indicator of one's policy preferences as well as a more robust predictor of partisan identification, vote choice and presidential approval (Layman 1997, 2001; Layman & Carmines, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008). Owing to the link between religiosity and conservative policy positions advocated of the Christian Right, traditionalists more often self identify as Republican, support Republican candidates and stake out conservative policy positions on both social and fiscal issues (Green & Guth, 1988; Kohut et al., 2000; Hunter 1991; Layman 2001).

Guth et al.'s (2006) analysis of the 2004 U.S. presidential election illuminates the chasm between religious traditionalists and progressives in terms of political preferences. While nearly 80% of self-identified evangelicals backed President George W. Bush, Senator John Kerry enjoyed the support of 72% of secularists and religious minorities. The election results thus reinforce Hunter's (1991) culture wars thesis in illustrating the predictive power of one's religious beliefs on political behavior in modern campaigns. Guth et al.'s (2006) findings likewise dovetail with Layman's (2001) conclusion that the parties have effectively realigned on religious beliefs resulting in a "Great Divide," or "God Gap" between the parties (e.g. Sullivan, 2008). Republicans and Democrats are now largely divided along a traditionalist-modernist cleavage moderated by religious differences on cultural issues (Layman, 2001).

As religious affiliation has waned in its ability to successfully predict political behaviors, scholars have broadened their approach in examining the influence of religion in the political process. No longer is analysis based simply on one's allegiance to a particular religious tradition adequate to capture the complexity of religious effects in the modern political environment. Thus scholars now recognize three distinct religious dimensions commonly known in the literature as the dimensions of "behaving," "believing" and "belonging" (Kohut et al., 2000; Leege & Kellstedt, 1993; Olson & Warber, 2008). Behaving refers to one's religious commitment as

measured through religious behaviors such as frequency in church attendance or reading the Bible. In contrast, believing refers to the degree to which one adheres to specific beliefs such as inerrancy in scripture or certainty in Biblical concepts (e.g. God, heaven, hell). Consistent with historical approaches to the study of religion, scholars likewise continue to recognize one's affiliation with a particular religious denomination, which represents the dimension of belonging.

Although much focus on the effect of religion in politics now centers on religious beliefs, notable ethnoreligious differences persist thus necessitating continued examination of the role of affiliation, or “belonging” on political behavior. Black Protestants and Jews, for example, continue to display pronounced support for the Democratic Party in spite of holding relatively orthodox religious beliefs (Layman, 2001). Nonetheless, the culture wars literature and its progeny (e.g. Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988) makes clear, the potency of religion in American politics for the majority of the electorate currently resides in the degree to which voters embrace traditional religious beliefs. Voters across religious traditions who adhere to more orthodox beliefs hold more conservative positions on a host of social and fiscal issues (Fiorina et al, 2006; Kohut et al., 2000). The once durable division between Protestants and Catholics has effectively disappeared as Catholics, and especially evangelical Protestants, have migrated toward the Republican Party, while mainline Protestants have trended toward the Democratic Party (see e.g. Fowler et al., 2004; Kohut et al., 2000; Manza & Brooks, 1999). In effect, the entry of the Christian Right into the political arena served to make salient traditional religious beliefs, in the process reorienting the parties around religiously-infused social issues.

### **Courting Christians and The Rise of Religious Rhetoric**

In response to the Christian Right's entry into politics and corresponding politicization of religion, candidates and political elites have increasingly pivoted toward religious voters.

Invoking the “God Strategy,” Domke and Coe (2008) demonstrate how modern American presidents have increasingly and intentionally courted religious voters through various appeals: be it increased visits to places of religious significance; frequent use of religious verbiage and imagery in presidential rhetoric and in the naming of legislative initiatives (e.g. Clinton’s “New Covenant”); or simply declaring more national days of prayer. Party platforms have likewise been crafted to resonate with religious voters by drawing on divisive social issues such as abortion, school prayer or gay marriage (Domke & Coe, 2008).

Analyzing more than 75 years of presidential speeches, Coe and Domke (2006) argue Ronald Reagan ushered in a new era of “God talk,” demonstrating Reagan referred to God at more than twice the rate of presidents dating back to FDR. Guth (2004) similarly notes how President George W. Bush frequently employed religious rhetoric and themes in his presidency to court evangelicals, especially following the events of September 11, 2001 (see also Domke, 2004). President Barack Obama has likewise followed in this tradition. During his first six months in office, Obama infused political speeches with references to Jesus Christ and other religious aspects far more often than George W. Bush did during the same period of his presidency (Javers, 2009). In a speech delivered at Georgetown University in April 2009, for example, Obama referenced Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which he followed the next month in a commencement address at the University of Notre Dame in commenting of his prior community work in Chicago, “It was through this service that I was brought to Christ” (Javers, 2009).

Although much of Obama’s presidential rhetoric has been overt, scholars likewise argue religious appeals often rely on subtle, coded themes and images crafted to reach religious voters without necessarily alienating more secular voters (Albertson, 2006; Domke & Coe, 2008; Unger, 2007; Weiss, 2010). Indeed, Calfano and Djupe (2009) describe “the code” as a “highly

sophisticated communication strategy...designed to appeal to an in-group without rousing out-group suspicions” (p. 329). Unger (2007) likens this process to dog whistling in that it reaches its intended audience outside the awareness of non-religious voters. The code as implemented by elites has included such practices as the subtle inclusion of Biblical scripture or religious references in speeches designed to appeal to religious conservatives. Former George W. Bush White House staffer David Kuo (2006) describes how Republicans frequently included strategic passages in speeches drawing on Biblical scripture and religious hymns such as, “I believe in an America that recognizes the worth of every individual, and leaves the ninety-nine to find the one stray lamb,” and “There is power, wonder working power, in the goodness and faith of the American people (p.60, see also Calfano & Djupe, 2009, p. 329-330). These practices are thought beneficial given the belief that such rhetoric resonates with religious individuals.

The expectation that subtle religious themes and imagery matter to religious voters is congruent with a corpus of literature that has demonstrated the potency of campaign appeals often resides in their use of coded images and language (e.g. Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002). In an experimental design examining the effects of “coded” appeals on college students, Calfano and Djupe (2009) demonstrate such appeals enhance support for candidates among evangelical students without alienating more secular students. Although Calfano and Djupe’s (2009) findings are limited by their lone experimental design and non-representative student sample as well as the use of fictitious candidates and campaign information, study results nonetheless provide useful insight as a starting point into the potential effects of religious appeals as a campaign strategy. Indeed, study results suggest the ability of religious appeals in political campaigns to activate or “prime” religious considerations among potential voters.

## **Priming Religious Traditionalism in Political Campaigns**

This study, therefore, extends the work of Calfano and Djupe (2009) and research in the area of religion in politics by examining religious appeals through the lens of priming. A corpus of research across academic disciplines has demonstrated the ability of exposure to media to significantly influence consumers' subsequent behaviors and judgments (see e.g. Anderson, 1997; Bushman, 1995; Iyengar et al., 1982, 1984; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Mendelberg, 2001; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007). Much of this work rests on the concept of priming, the psychological process wherein exposure to a given stimulus activates, or "primes," existing mental constructs, which then serve as standards for subsequent evaluations of other concepts (Goidel, Shields & Peffley, 1997; Higgins, 1996).

Although multiple theoretical approaches could be applied to examine the effects of religious appeals, priming provides an ideal lens to examine effects born of both implicit and explicit messaging. Framing, for example, speaks to outcome effects brought about by the presentation of an issue, in essence an overarching theme that subsequently influences individual understanding of an event (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997). While a campaign can frame a candidate as explicitly religious, as noted, appeals to religion are frequently subtle, often employing cues tangential to the primary theme of an advertisement or speech. Because priming effects may emerge from mere exposure to a stimulus that promotes subsequent activation of concepts and not a shift in the understanding of an issue *per se*, priming thus provides an intuitive approach to examine effects born of both subtle and overt messaging.

The application of priming as a framework to study media effects is vast, ranging from the study of political priming (e.g. Goidel et al., 1997; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990) to the role of media violence on subsequent behavior (e.g. Bushman, 1998; Josephson, 1987) to the

reinforcement of gender and racial stereotypes (e.g. Domke, 2001; Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Johnson, Trawalter & Dovidio, 2000). The theoretical foundation of priming rests on network models of memory (e.g. Collins & Loftus, 1975; Collins & Quillian, 1969), which conceive of information stored as concepts or nodes and associated such that priming one concept (e.g. president) can activate other linked concepts (e.g. Barack Obama) that are then applied to evaluate information (Dillman Carpentier et al., 2008). As it pertains to the political sector, research into priming suggests prominent media coverage of an issue primes the likelihood that individuals will subsequently use the highlighted issue as a criterion to evaluate political policies or candidates (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

Numerous scholars have substantiated that media coverage influences the factors by which individuals evaluate political figures (e.g. Goidel et al, 1997; Hetherington, 1996; Iyengar et al, 1982, 1984; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Pan & Kosicki, 1997). Indeed, priming effects have been demonstrated across a host of political domains including: the activation of racial attitudes through political advertisements (Mendelberg 2001; Huber & Lapinski 2006); the ability of news coverage to influence presidential trait evaluations (Iyengar & Kinder 1987) and job approval based on economic (Goidel & Langley, 1995; Hetherington, 1996), foreign policy and defense news coverage (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder 1990; Pan & Kosicki, 1997); as well as the priming of individual value orientations (Feldman & Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005).

The broad findings that exposure to media influences the manner in which individuals evaluate political figures and issues through the activation of various knowledge structures, be it racial attitudes, economic perceptions or other constructs, indicates the ability of media exposure to similarly activate religious considerations. Likewise, Calfano and Djupe's (2009) findings that exposure to coded religious statements enhances favorability among evangelical students



suggests priming effects are likely to emerge in the context of campaign appeals. In essence, religious appeals should heighten the impact of religiosity on evaluations of political candidates. Campaign ads drawing on religious appeals should resonate among voters such that religious considerations become activated and subsequently used in formulating candidate evaluations.

More specifically, however, we should observe this effect to be most pronounced along the “believing” dimension of religiosity – that is, based on one’s degree of religious traditionalism as opposed to commitment or affiliation. The consistent findings drawn from the culture wars literature demonstrating traditionalism to be more diagnostic on a host of political behaviors relative to other religious dimensions (Hunter, 1991; Layman 1997, 2001; Layman & Carmines, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008) strongly suggests religious priming to be similarly pronounced among traditionalists. I therefore expect: (H1) Exposure to religious appeals will activate religious traditionalism, which will subsequently influence candidate evaluations. This priming-traditionalism hypothesis thus proposes exposure to religious appeals to result in religious priming, and these effects to be most pronounced based on one’s religious beliefs. Assuming religious appeals are present in a political advertisement, one’s religious beliefs should serve as a stronger predictor of candidate evaluation relative to other religious factors.

### **Religious Priming in Variable Information Environments**

Providing religious priming occurs, regardless of particular religious dimension(s), it is important to consider the context in which appeals are likely to emerge. Far from occurring in a vacuum, religious appeals deployed in political campaigns are inevitably but a small part of electoral environments rife in information. Thus, an obvious question arises as to how effective a strategy of religious appeals may be for candidates faced with voters, even particularly religious voters, routinely bombarded with additional, often non-religious political information.

Research suggests priming effects may hinge, in large part, on the context of information environments. Although disagreement exists as to when and under what circumstances priming effects are most likely to occur, literature on political priming indicates effects are not pervasive and uniform, but rather limited or bounded in practice. Krosnick and Kinder (1990) argue priming effects to be moderated by political sophistication, with effects most pronounced among political novices, owing to the idea that novices possess less complex beliefs. In essence, sophisticates possess a richer store of considerations to draw upon, thereby limiting the effect of any single piece of information (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; see also Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). Huber and Lapinski (2006) similarly contend priming to be more prominent among novices because, unlike sophisticates, novices do not automatically bring predispositions to the fore in formulating political judgments. To the extent relative sophisticates draw upon predispositions in conflict with a stimulus message, potential priming effects become attenuated.

In contrast, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) suggest priming effects are dependent on one's ability to interpret, store and subsequently retrieve media messages, and it is only sophisticates that possess the integrated schemata likely to yield significant priming effects. Sophisticates, not novices, are thus most susceptible to priming. Taking yet a different approach, Goidel and colleagues (1997) argue contextual factors such as the nature of news events and information environments may influence potential priming effects as much, or more so, than political sophistication or awareness, owing to variability in the complexity of information flows.

In the context of political campaigns, potential voters are bombarded by information from competing candidates and campaigns, friends and colleagues, organizations and the press. This is especially true of competitive elections producing more complex information environments. Regardless of whether one embraces the view that political sophistication moderates priming

such that novices (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990) or sophisticates (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993) are most affected, the complex information characteristics of political campaigns are likely to blunt the effects of relatively isolated appeals as both novices and sophisticates become inundated with campaign appeals and news coverage potentially priming them on a host of competing issues.

From this perspective, it is the complex informational nature of campaigns that is likely to moderate the effect(s) of isolated campaign appeals. To examine how the relative complexity of informational environments associated with campaigns may influence priming, the study explores effects emerging from a more complex non-partisan environment by manipulating the availability of additional secular candidate information. Further, and as discussed below, the dissertation also examines priming effects in a partisan environment by manipulating the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals. As competitive campaigns are rife with information, it is worth noting virtually limitless informational aspects could be manipulated and thus studied, such as the availability of oppositional messaging. I opt to explore the effects of additional secular, non-partisan candidate information as well as the effects stemming from the presence of partisan cues as both are realistic of information found in typical campaigns and, in the case of partisan cues, shown to be highly influential in a voter's calculus.

As priming effects should be reduced in relatively complex informational environments where potential voters are faced with an array of secular candidate information on which to base political evaluations, I anticipate (H2) Individual religious priming effects will be reduced in a complex information environment relative to priming effects observed in an impoverished information environment. This information-environment hypothesis thus assumes exposure to additional secular, non-partisan political information will moderate the priming effects of

religious appeals – a pattern that, if demonstrated, would speak to the relative applicability of religious beliefs as an evaluative standard among voters in complex information environments.

### **Religious Priming in Variable Partisan Environments**

Given the importance of party identification to political campaigns, it is likewise critical to consider the impact of partisan information environments on the potential influence of religious appeals. Literature on political behavior has long demonstrated the importance of one's partisan predispositions in shaping political attitudes (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008; Nie, Verba & Petrocik, 1976). Likewise, scholars have recognized the importance of informational shortcuts, or heuristics, especially in the form of partisan cues to guide voter decisions (e.g. Downs 1957; Mondak, 1993; Popkin, 1991). Rahn (1993) argues, for example, that partisan cues are the “most powerful cues” provided in elections; “The cue provided by the party label is simple, direct, and . . . consequential in shaping individuals' perceptions and evaluations of political candidates” (p. 473). Goren and colleagues (2009) similarly note the pivotal role of party affiliation to the formation of individual political judgments, “Party identification represents the most stable and influential political predisposition in the belief systems of ordinary citizens” (p. 805). Given the influential power of partisan cues in campaigns coupled with the strength of one's religious beliefs to significantly shape political behavior (e.g. Layman, 2001; Layman & Carmines, 1997), it is prudent to examine how partisanship and the inclusion of partisan cues in religious appeals may alter any priming effects.

Although I am unaware of any work examining the extent to which one's partisanship and the presence of partisan cues may affect political evaluations in the context of religious priming, researchers have examined the influential role of partisan cues in other domains. Research has demonstrated partisan cues may influence partisans to alter relatively short-term

perceptions on issues such as the state of the economy and presidential approval (Bartels, 2002). More recent research has even confirmed the ability of partisan cues to modify the expression of enduring political values such as equal opportunity and self-reliance (Goren et al., 2009).

Analyzing the effect of source cues on attitudes held toward ethnic minorities, Kam (2007) finds partisan cues effectively blunt the effect of prior negative attitudes held of Hispanics in determining vote choice. To the extent the mere presence of partisan cues significantly attenuates deeply held ethnic attitudes, Kam's (2007) work illustrates the potency of partisan cues to shape political behavior. Explaining the strength of partisan cues, Kam (2007) argues, "citizens...use party cues over attitudes toward an ethnic group because party cues are widely shared heuristics that seem more appropriate and more legitimate for political decision-making" (p. 362). The presence of partisan cues in religious appeals is therefore likely to be consequential in determining the effectiveness of religious appeals in activating religious beliefs.

Applied to religious priming, Kam's (2007) findings coupled with the enduring attachment many have to political parties suggest the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals to likely reduce, and perhaps overshadow, religious priming effects. Similar to the informational effects hypothesized above (H2) suggesting religious priming to be moderated by the presence of additional secular candidate information, so too will priming effects be attenuated by the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals as party attachments individuals possess will heavily influence evaluations. In essence, the presence of partisan cues will activate enduring partisan attachments thereby reducing the impact of religion on candidate evaluation, while simultaneously promoting evaluation based on one's partisan predispositions.

Given this relationship, I expect (H3) The relationship between evaluations and traditionalism will be strengthened among viewers of non-partisan religious appeals and reduced

among those exposed to partisan religious appeals, while the relationship between evaluations and partisan predispositions will be heightened among viewers of partisan religious appeals. In essence, this partisan-influence hypothesis suggests evaluations will hinge on the presence of partisan cues. While religious evaluation will be more pronounced among viewers of religious appeals absent partisan cues, viewers of partisan religious appeals will become more reliant on their partisan predispositions. Such effects would be consistent with the information-environment hypothesis above in that both hypotheses imply religious-based evaluation to wane in the face of additional political information. Moreover, such findings would illuminate the importance individuals place on religious considerations relative to traditional political factors in formulating political judgments in diverse campaign information environments.

### **Implicit and Explicit Appeals and the Role of Societal Norms**

Having considered the potential moderating influence of partisan and non-partisan environments on religious priming effects, I now turn to the relative effectiveness of religious appeals based on differences in appeal types. Given that religious appeals are crafted to resonate with religious voters through both subtle and overt methods (Unger, 2007; Domke & Coe, 2008), examination of potential differential effects based on appeal type warrants further study to more fully explicate the strategic implications of religious appeals in modern political campaigns. To develop theoretical expectations as to the effects likely to emerge from exposure to implicit and explicit religious appeals, I rely on prior research drawn from racial priming literature, which demonstrates implicit and explicit appeals resonate differently among potential voters (e.g. Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002; White, 2007).

In her seminal work on racial appeals and campaign strategy, Mendelberg (2001) argues the types of racial appeals employed by politicians changed in the wake of shifting societal

norms on racial equality. Politicians routinely employed explicit racial appeals prior to the Civil Rights era, but transitioned to the use of more implicit appeals in keeping with the shift in norms toward racial equality following the Civil Rights movement. The transition to implicit appeals, Mendelberg (2001) argues, simultaneously provided the ability of candidates to subconsciously tap latent racial attitudes among voters without appearing as overtly racist – a proposition she illustrates with the now (in)famous Willie Horton ad that subconsciously activated latent racial attitudes by playing off of stereotypic portrayals of violent black men (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Given the shift in societal norms on race, the power of modern racial appeals thus relies on using subtle code words and images (Valentino et al., 2002) as well as issues typically associated with African-Americans such as crime (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000) and welfare (Gilens, 1999) to activate racial attitudes outside of voter awareness. As has been observed, in many contexts, primes are more potent when subjects are unaware of their presence (Higgins, 1996).

Mendelberg (2001) additionally argues, however, when voters are made aware of candidates playing the “race card,” the priming effect of racial attitudes on subsequent evaluation diminishes. Calling attention to, or “calling out,” the subtle play on racial stereotypes by elites serves to expose the act as a violation of racial norms, thereby evoking an egalitarian backlash among voters and effectively muting any priming effects. More recently, Huber and Lapinski (2006) have qualified Mendelberg’s findings in demonstrating the effect of racial appeals varies with levels of sophistication – operationalized as education. Although highly-educated individuals more likely to possess egalitarian norms dismiss explicit appeals consistent with Mendelberg’s (2001) theory, novices are less likely to distinguish implicit from explicit appeals and are primed by either appeal (Huber & Lapinski, 2006). Thus, for less-educated individuals, implicit appeals are no more effective at priming racial attitudes.

Given the lack of research examining the consequences of religious appeals, it is unclear if the differences observed of implicit and explicit appeals in racial priming similarly hold in the domain of religious priming. A caveat is recognition of the notable differences in societal norms held of race and religion, and therefore how racial and religious priming strategies are likely to play out in modern campaigns. Relative to societal views on race, religion plays a markedly different role in society and modern American politics. A vast majority of Americans identify with religious organizations with more people involved in religious denominations than in any other type of voluntary association (Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2006). Indeed, it is the social acceptability of religion in American culture and the intimate role religion plays for many individuals (Carroll & Roof, 1993; Greeley, 1972; Putnam & Campbell, 2010) that suggests religion may be appealed to effectively in a much more explicit manner relative to racial priming. Consider, a 2003 Pew Research poll found nearly twice as many individuals (41%) responding there had been *too little* reference to religious faith and prayer by politicians as opposed to *too much* (21%) (Pew, 2004). In 2010, 37% of respondents continued to state there was too little expression of religion in politics relative to those believing there was too much, 29% (Pew, 2012). Moreover, as Domke and Coe (2008) note, some of the most effective politicians, especially in presidential politics, have relied heavily on religious appeals in recent decades (see also Coe & Domke, 2006).

Such findings suggest the ability of politicians to effectively appeal to potential voters through more explicit strategies. At the same time, however, there are notable reasons why implicit religious appeals may prove equally advantageous. Just as implicit racial appeals can activate racial attitudes through subtly playing on media-perpetuated stereotypes (Gilens, 1999; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007; Valentino et al., 2002), candidates may be



able to similarly activate religious considerations through subtle symbolic cues or to policy positions that, although not specifically religious, have nonetheless become effectively systematized to religion (e.g. pro-life, traditional marriage). Indeed, as Putnam and Campbell (2010) note, the two most prominent issues among the Christian Right are abortion and the promotion of traditional sexual norms. Hence, implicit appeals tapping such salient issues may provide candidates the benefit of priming religious voters without appearing as overtly religious, thus minimizing any backlash for explicitly exploiting religion or increased media scrutiny of their religious tenets (Kuo, 2006) as faced by multiple candidates in the recent 2012 Republican presidential primary campaign (Goldberg, 2011; Lizza, 2011; Wilder, 2011).

Given theoretical and practical considerations why both explicit and implicit religious appeals are likely to be effective campaign strategies, I therefore expect (H4) Implicit and explicit appeals to be equally effective in promoting religious priming. This implicit-explicit appeals hypothesis thus implies candidates the ability to “speak” to religious voters through ostensibly non-religious means, a finding that if demonstrated has marked implications for how scholars consider the rhetoric of political elites, especially in the context of political campaigns.

At the same time, it is unclear what effect, if any, calling attention to candidates for appealing to religion may have in potentially limiting the effect of religious appeals as a campaign strategy, akin to the reduction of priming effects observed in racial priming literature when candidates suffer backlash effects when “called out” by elites for their use of racial appeals (Mendelberg, 2001). A caveat, however, is that powerful norms also shape societal views of religion. Just as racial egalitarianism serves as a potent norm shaping racial priming strategies, the long-adhered-to principle of separation of church and state influences the role of religion in politics. In recent years, prominent proponents of church-state separation have very publically

denounced the overt use of religion by politicians and the mixing of religion and government in general. During the 2008 election cycle, for example, *First Freedom First*, a partnership of *The Interfaith Alliance Foundation* and *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, launched a national ad campaign promoting religious freedom vis-à-vis the separation of church and state, while condemning the growing mix of religion and politics.

Moreover, recent polling demonstrates a trend toward individuals growing increasingly uncomfortable with the use of religious rhetoric by politicians and the role of religion in politics, even among self-identified Republicans and conservatives (Pew, 2008; Pew, 2012). The combination of mounting public opposition to the overt mixing of religion in politics owing to the principle of church-state separation coupled with growing unease – especially among conservatives – about candidates’ use of religious rhetoric as well as increased media scrutiny of candidates’ religious views (e.g. Cominsky, 2011; Keller, 2011) argues candidates may face backlash effects by being called out for “inappropriately” using religion in campaigns.

Conversely, although there is a growing percentage of individuals expressing unease about the use of religion by political elites, a sizable majority of individuals continue to respond they are comfortable with the current volume of religion espoused by politicians or would actually prefer additional expression (Pew, 2012). Taken together, the general level of comfort a majority of Americans report with religious expression in modern politics coupled with marked religious involvement demonstrated by large portions of the electorate seemingly precludes the emergence of any notable backlash effects resulting from calling out candidates for appealing to religion. Simply put, widespread socialization of religion in American society tends to negate the likelihood calling attention to the strategic use of religion in campaigns will blunt religious priming effects. As such, my final expectation is (H5) Calling out (i.e. drawing attention to) the

use of religious appeals in political campaigns will not significantly attenuate religious priming effects. This attention-attenuation hypothesis thus implies candidates will not suffer adverse backlash effects from being called out for deploying religious political appeals.

Admittedly, the concept that candidates will suffer little adverse effects for mounting explicit religious appeals runs counter to racial priming expectations, so too the proposition of no difference in effects born of implicit and explicit appeals (i.e. H4). As noted, however, the social acceptability of religion in American culture fundamentally alters expectations. Simply put, religiosity does not evoke the same normative pressures that are associated with race in society. As such, religion may be appealed to through more explicit methods by candidates without fear of voter or electoral repercussions.

## Study Hypotheses

Having established clear expectations, I now turn to formal methods and analysis. For convenience, however, Table 2.1 summarizes hypotheses tested in subsequent chapters.

Table 2.1 – Study Hypotheses

Study Hypotheses	
H1 – The Priming-Traditionalism Hypothesis	Exposure to religious appeals will activate religious traditionalism (beliefs), which will subsequently influence candidate evaluations.
H2 – The Information-Environment Hypothesis	Individual religious priming effects will be reduced in a complex information environment relative to priming effects observed in an impoverished information environment.
H3 – The Partisan-Influence Hypothesis	The relationship between evaluations and traditionalism will be strengthened among viewers of non-partisan religious appeals and reduced among those exposed to partisan religious appeals, while the relationship between evaluations and partisan predispositions will be heightened among viewers of partisan religious appeals.
H4 – The Implicit-Explicit Appeals Hypothesis	Implicit and explicit appeals will be equally effective in promoting religious priming.
H5 – The Attention-Attenuation Hypothesis	Calling out (i.e. drawing attention to) the use of religious appeals in political campaigns will not significantly attenuate religious priming effects.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

As is evident from the literature review and proposed hypotheses, the overall project focuses on the effects of various religious appeals on individual political behavior and in differing information environments. Given the study's concern with explaining media effects, and therefore aspects of causality, the dissertation employs a series of media experiments. There exists general agreement among scholars on the use of experiments for examining questions of causality (e.g. Kinder & Palfrey, 1993; Weisberg, Krosnick & Bowen, 1996; Westley 1989; Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Wimmer and Dominick (2006), state the "experiment is undoubtedly the best social science research method for establishing causality" (p. 231), while Valentino, Hutchings and White (2002) note the experiment's "greatest strength is its ability to isolate the casual impact of communication factors on political attitudes and behavior" (p. 77). Indeed, it is precisely the ability to isolate causal effects of communication on potential voters' subsequent political evaluations that experimental designs are particularly appropriate for examining the consequences of religious appeals on prospective voters.

In total, the study employs five individual experiments. For convenience, the design of each experiment, including corresponding pre- and posttest measures, is discussed in greater detail in the context of the analytical chapter focusing on the hypothesis each experiment is designed to test. In general, however, each experiment employs a between subjects, pretest-posttest design with subtle modifications in terms of survey instruments, experimental stimuli and sample composition. Experiments #1 and #2, which are designed to test whether exposure to religious appeals results in priming and the extent to which information environments may alter priming effects, also incorporate multi-factorial manipulations as discussed in more detail in

Chapter 4. These subtle differences aside, participants in each experiment were presented a statement of informed consent and then completed a brief socio-political pretest. Participants were then randomly assigned to an experimental condition exposing them to stimuli (campaign advertisements) designed to test a hypothesis(es) under study, followed by a posttest survey asking subjects to evaluate the candidate referenced in the stimulus material.<sup>5</sup>

### **Experimental Samples**

In terms of study participants, four of five experiments rely on undergraduate student samples drawn from the Louisiana State University Manship School of Mass Communication. Although scholars have long relied on college student participants in conducting academic research, some scholars have criticized the practice arguing college students possess markedly different characteristics compared to typical adults, a situation that potentially undermines the validity of research relying on college-student samples (e.g. Sears, 1986). Relative to adults, Sears (1986) argues college students, on average, possess greater cognitive ability, yet have less crystallized social and political attitudes. Likewise, college students have a greater need for peer approval, yet simultaneously possess highly unstable peer and group relationships. Thus, research employing college students, especially in the context of artificial experimental settings, has the potential to produce ecologically biased associations relative to relationships observed of adults in natural settings (Sears, 1986).

In an effort to address concerns over the possibility of student-based studies to produce biased results, I additionally incorporate an experiment drawn on a nationally representative cross section of adults.<sup>6</sup> The adult study both replicates and extends one of the student-based experiments, thereby permitting direct comparisons in terms of experimental effects between the

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix for copies of IRB approval forms and survey instruments.

<sup>6</sup> The adult experiment, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, was fielded by *Knowledge Networks* in August, 2010.

two age groups. As discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, the effects observed between the two populations demonstrate striking similarities, a fact that provides reassurance in current study findings born of college student subjects, and more importantly, provides substantial credibility as to overall study findings regarding the effects of religious appeals on potential voters – both younger and older voters alike.

To further alleviate any concerns over the use of both student and adult samples, I additionally compare the religious attitudes held of college students and adults prior to formal discussion of experimental results. Recall, the proposed hypotheses argue religious priming is likely to be most pronounced based on one's degree of traditionalism – that is, the extent to which one adheres to orthodox or progressive religious beliefs. Consistent with the culture wars literature (e.g. Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988), relative to religious affiliation (i.e. “belonging”) or commitment (i.e. “behaving”), one's religious beliefs should prove more diagnostic in terms of observed priming effects. Thus, I examine any differences in the religious beliefs of students and adults prior to further analysis in an effort to demonstrate the similarities in beliefs held of self-identified Christian students and adults.

If, as prior research argues, influential religious socialization begins early in one's life (e.g. Carroll and Roof, 1993), religious beliefs should be reasonably well formed by the point one attends college, and thus minimal difference between college students and adults should emerge in terms of religious beliefs. Indeed, precisely because religious socialization begins early in life relative to the formation of other attitudes (e.g. political beliefs), we should observe general consistency in the beliefs of Christian adult and college student populations. Although scholars have noted marked variability in religious commitment among college students relative to adult populations, in large part because the collegiate experience tends to be disruptive in

terms of religious attendance (Hoge, Johnson & Luidens, 1994; Putnam & Campbell, 2010), underlying core beliefs should nonetheless persist. Indeed, the variability in religious behaviors of individuals throughout life is a notable reason why scholars observe multiple dimensions of religion and recognize the value of tapping religious traditionalism, as it tends to provide a more stable, diagnostic measure across generations (Layman, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008).

To illustrate similarities in religious beliefs held of adults and students, I construct index measures of religious traditionalism created from responses from adult and student pretest questionnaires, which I subsequently plot in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below. The traditionalism measure created from the student experiments consists of eight religious beliefs questions.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, a single question taken from the General Social Survey asked students to describe their views of Biblical literalism, with three response options ranging from the Bible is the literal word of God to the Bible is a book of fables.<sup>8</sup> Views on religious tradition were tapped with a question drawn from the Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics (2004) asking students to describe their thoughts on religious beliefs from the following options: “We should strive to preserve beliefs and practices; we should strive to adapt beliefs and practices to new times; we should strive to adopt new beliefs and practices.” Students’ religious orientation was tapped by asking: “Which of the following best describes your religious views? Fundamentalist/ Evangelical; Traditional/Conservative; Mainline/Moderate; Progressive/Liberal; Not Religious.”

In addition to their views on Biblical literalism, religious tradition and orientation, students were asked five belief certainty measures. Pretest student questionnaires asked participants, “How certain is your belief in (God/heaven/hell/the devil/ that Jesus Christ is the Son of God)” with possible responses ranging from “absolutely certain” to “I do not believe in

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<sup>7</sup> Religious measures used to form traditionalism indices for students and adults were selected based on a factor analysis discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. See Table 4.1.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix Survey Instruments #1-3 for specific question wording.

(God, heaven, etc). ” All responses were recoded to indicate more traditional beliefs. The eight questions were then summed to create a highly reliable measure of religious traditionalism ( $\alpha=.93$ ) and scaled from 0 (progressivism) to 1(traditionalism).

A measure of religious traditionalism was similarly constructed from adult pretest responses to four beliefs questions.<sup>9</sup> Adults were presented the identical questions asked of students regarding Biblical literalism, views on religious tradition, religious orientation self placement and belief certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As with the student measure, all responses were recoded to indicate more traditional views and then summed to create an internally consistent traditionalism index variable ( $\alpha=.82$ ) scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating more orthodox views. The distribution of religious traditionalism among self-identified Christian students is presented in Figure 3.1, while Figure 3.2 presents the distribution of religious traditionalism among self-identified Christians in the national adult sample.

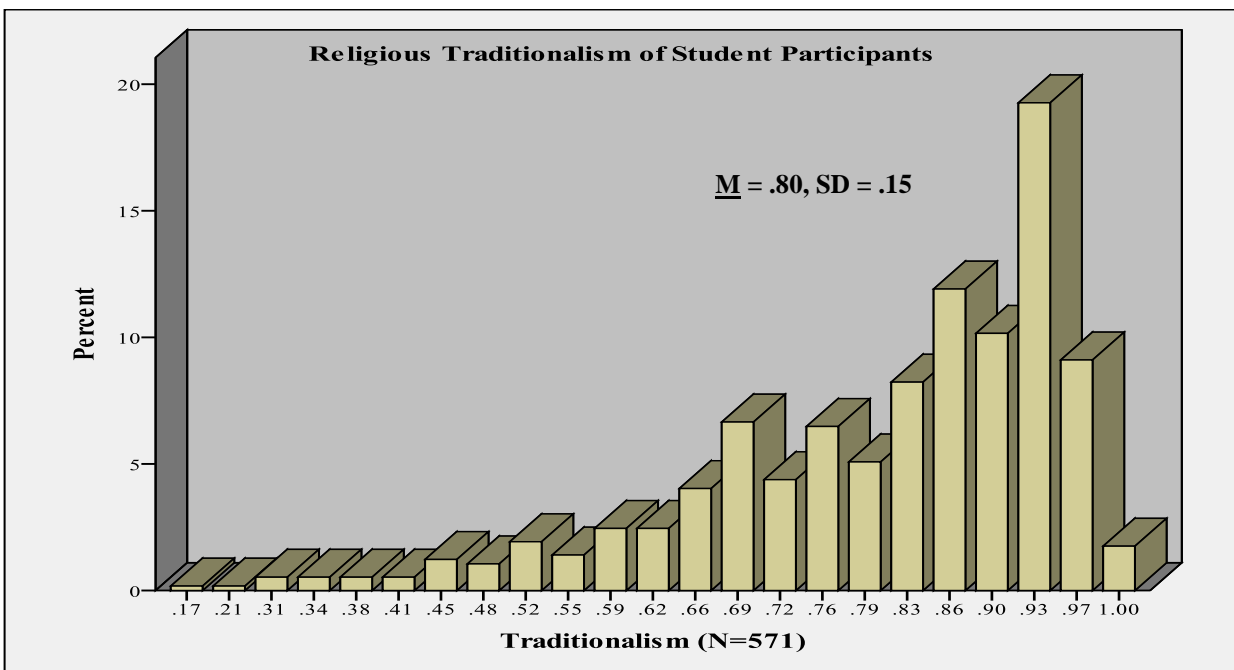


Figure 3.1 – Religious traditionalism among self-identified Christian students

<sup>9</sup> As *Knowledge Networks* determines sample size based, in part, on survey length, surveys instruments were shortened to maximize sample size. Hence, only four beliefs measures were included in the online adult study.



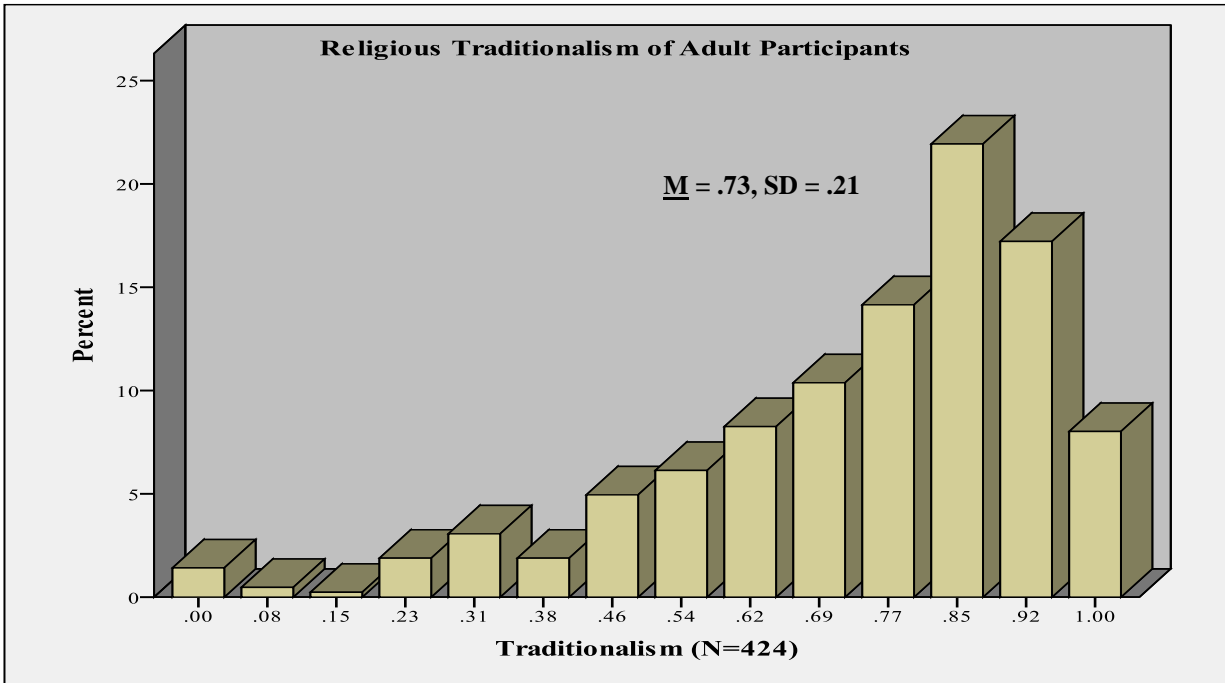


Figure 3.2 – Religious traditionalism among self-identified Christian adults

As illustrated in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, remarkable similarity emerges for the distribution of traditionalism among student and adult Christian identifiers. While students demonstrate a slightly higher average level of traditionalism ( $\underline{M}=.80$ ,  $SD=.15$ ) relative to adult participants ( $\underline{M}=.73$ ,  $SD=.21$ ), both groups nonetheless display a very similar distribution of traditionalism. The similarity in the distributions of a nationally-representative adult sample as well as a Southern college student sample speaks to common, core beliefs shared of self-identified Christians in general (e.g. belief in God, heaven, Jesus Christ is the Son of God).<sup>10</sup>

As it pertains to the current study, the similarity in beliefs demonstrated of younger and older participants alike provide a measure of reassurance in the use of college student samples to examine potential priming effects resulting from exposure to religious appeals. Indeed, as demonstrated in subsequent chapters, exposure to political appeals infused with religious cues

<sup>10</sup> An important distinction here is that distributions are based on self-identified Christians within each sample – the focus of the current study. Distributions based on all participants in each sample would likely reveal greater variance in beliefs between age groups, owing to an increasing percentage of younger generations foregoing organized religion (Pew, 2010; Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

activates religious traditionalism, which significantly influences subsequent candidate evaluations, and this effect is shown to be consistent across student and adult participants.

In sum, the similarity between the religious beliefs held of student and adult participants suggests the effects observed of student populations to approximate those likely to emerge in adult populations. Unlike other areas of academic research wherein scholars have expressed concern that the use of “college sophomores” likely yields skewed results (e.g. Sears, 1986), the consistency in religious beliefs observed of self-identified Christian students and adults in the present study resulting in equally consistent priming effects presented in subsequent chapters suggests the general appropriateness of using college students as experimental subjects. Having established general consistency in the religious beliefs of Christian adults and students across study experiments, I now turn to formal analysis examining the consequences of religious appeals in political campaigns.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRIMING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONALISM**

#### **Chapter Overview**

Formal analysis begins by examining whether exposure to religious appeals in a low-information environment activates traditionalism leading to significant changes in political behavior.<sup>11</sup> Exposure to religious appeals should heighten the impact of religiosity on political evaluations, and this effect should be most pronounced based on one's religious beliefs – that is, the degree to which one adheres to traditional religious doctrine. Recall, the religious-priming hypothesis (H1) proposes that, consistent with the culture wars literature, religious appeals will activate religious traditionalism, which will subsequently influence candidate evaluations.

To establish whether exposure to religious appeals primes traditional religious beliefs, the chapter begins with a review of experimental procedures undertaken to test the religious-priming hypothesis. Following a description of experiments, results of an exploratory factor analysis performed on student religious pretest measures are presented. Consistent with previous literature (Layman, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008), a distinct dimension emerges for religious commitment based on one's religious behaviors as well as a clear dimension of traditionalism based on religious beliefs. Index measures for traditionalism and commitment are then modeled across posttest candidate evaluation measures with results confirming expectations – exposure to religious appeals results in significant priming effects, which are shown to be most pronounced for religious traditionalism relative to religious commitment or particular religious affiliation.

#### **Experimental Procedures**

To examine priming effects resulting from exposure to religious appeals, I rely on two nearly identical experiments, the first administered to a sample of 161 LSU undergraduate

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<sup>11</sup> Chapter 4 explores priming effects in the absence of additional candidate information. Although Experiments #1 and #2 include an information manipulation, only the no-information conditions are analyzed in the current chapter.

students, and the second experiment administered to a national cross section of 562 adults recruited via random digit dialing. Specifically, the first experiment was fielded in September 2009 and conducted in the Manship School of Mass Communication's Media Effects Lab, while the second online experiment was fielded by *Knowledge Networks* in August 2010.<sup>12</sup>

I include analysis of experiments drawn on both a student and adult sample for three key reasons. First, the student study included more extensive questionnaires<sup>13</sup> including measures of religious commitment, thus enabling diagnostic comparisons between religious commitment and traditionalism. Second, the follow-up, online adult study served to both replicate initial student findings and extend those to a nationally representative sample, thereby strengthening external validity. Third, analyses reveal subtle, yet important differences in how religious appeals resonate with participants in each population – an observation detailed later in the chapter.

Each experiment employed a 2 (Prior Information: Present, Absent) x 2 (Religious Appeals: Present, Absent) condition, pretest-posttest design relying on identical stimuli. All participants in both experiments completed a brief pretest questionnaire as described below and then were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions. The information factor served to manipulate the participant's information environment by presenting half of each sample a one-page modified version of a candidate's web site detailing his issue positions (described below). The remaining subjects in each experiment did not view the web site.

Upon viewing (or not viewing) the candidate's web site, participants in each experiment were then exposed to an approximately one-minute advertisement of a candidate. The advertisement served as the second factor – the religious appeals factor – under manipulation.

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<sup>12</sup> Of 1,298 participants initially recruited in the *Knowledge Networks* panel, 840 participants (64.7%) agreed to participate yielding 562 complete responses for a 43.3% completion rate based on initial recruitment.

<sup>13</sup> As noted, the online adult study employed abbreviated survey instruments owing to constraints imposed by *Knowledge Networks*. As survey length determined sample size, surveys were shortened to maximize the sample.

Half of participants in each experiment viewed the advertisement in its original form containing religious cues, while the other participants viewed the same ad with the religious cues digitally redacted. Save for the subtle edits, the ads were equivalent. All participants in both experiments then completed a posttest survey of evaluative measures of the candidate as described below.

By manipulating the presence or absence of religious cues in the campaign advertisement, the religious appeals factor served to test whether religious priming occurs upon exposure to religious appeals – that is, a test of the priming-traditionalism hypothesis. Simultaneously, the information manipulation served as a test of the information-environment hypothesis by examining the influence of complex information environments on priming effects. While the current chapter focuses on priming effects in low-information environments, that is just the religious appeals manipulation, Chapter 5 additionally incorporates the information factor in exploring the influence of information environments on priming effects.

### **Pretest Measures**

Participants in the initial student-based experiment completed more extensive surveys, while adult participants in the follow-up, online experiment completed abbreviated versions of those used in the student experiment.<sup>14</sup> For parsimony, discussion of each pretest focuses on religious measures. However, additional questions were included and are provided in the appendix for reference. Subjects in each experiment were presented a battery of questions tapping aspects of their religiosity. Student participants were asked a religious salience question tapping how important religion is in their life followed by a question asking their religious affiliation among seven response options based on the historical development of major religious traditions and denominations (Steensland et al., 2000). Student participants were also asked a fundamentalist to progressive orientation question as well as a question tapping their views of

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #1 for the student experiment and Survey Instrument #2 for the adult study.

religious tradition (Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004). Students' religious commitment was obtained with four behavioral questions ascertaining how often they prayed, read the Bible, attended worship service and attended non-worship church services. Finally, student participants were presented a battery of religious beliefs questions drawn from General Social Surveys. Specifically, participants were asked their views on Biblical literalism as well as their belief certainty in God, heaven, hell, the devil and whether Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Adult participants in the online experiment were similarly asked to identify their religious affiliation and how important religion was in their life. Likewise, adult participants were asked four belief measures also posed of students in Experiment #1, specifically their views on Biblical literalism and religious tradition, a fundamentalism vs. progressive self-placement measure and their belief certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Additionally, participants in both the student and national adult study were asked to identify their partisan affiliation and ideology on seven-point scales ranging from "Strong Democrat" to "Strong Republican" and "Extremely Liberal" to "Extremely Conservative," respectively.

### **Experimental Stimuli**

After completing the pretest, participants in each experiment were instructed they would be exposed to candidate information released by the Saxby Chambliss for U.S. Senate campaign. A relatively unknown senate candidate was selected to help minimize the possibility of a polarizing figure overshadowing the effect of the information manipulation (Taber and Lodge, 2006). Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four conditions based on the 2 x 2 design described above. The information factor, designed to manipulate one's information environment, presented half of the participants in each experiment with a condensed version of the 2008 Chambliss for Senate web site. The modified web site provided Chambliss' position on

the economy, energy, taxes, education and gun control – all statements consistent with the candidate’s stated issue positions on his 2008 web site.<sup>15</sup> No religious statements or issue positions commonly associated with religion were provided so as to avoid priming religious considerations with the information manipulation. Thus, the information factor manipulated the extent of secular, non-partisan candidate knowledge possessed by a participant to determine if more complex information environments potentially moderate religious priming effects – the focus of Chapter 5.

Following the information manipulation wherein participants were exposed (or not) to the additional candidate information, all subjects in each experiment then viewed an actual advertisement released by the Chambliss campaign – specifically, Chambliss’ “Values” ad (see Figure 4.1). The ad was selected for three critical

reasons: its inclusion of religious cues, its lack of identifiable partisan cue and the fact it represents a “real world” ad used in an actual campaign. The only aspect that varied across conditions was the presence or absence



Figure 4.1 – Chambliss “Values” ad

of religious cues. In one condition, participants viewed the ad in its original form, which included three religious cues: Americans should “be able to choose how they worship,” “I believe in a loving and all powerful God,” and my beliefs force me to fight for, “the sanctity of life.”<sup>16</sup> While participants in the religious cues condition in each experiment viewed the ad including the three religious appeals, participants in the control condition in both experiments were exposed to the values ad with the three religious statements edited out. Save for these

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix Experiment #1 web site manipulation.

<sup>16</sup> Complete ad copy is available in the appendix with the three religious cues highlighted. The ad is also available for viewing in its original form on at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yB\\_w2BxuCiE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yB_w2BxuCiE)

subtle edits, the ads were equivalent.<sup>17</sup> The religious cues manipulation thus permitted examination of whether exposure to religious appeals activated religious considerations that were subsequently applied on posttest evaluative measures.

### **Posttest Measures**

Following the information and religious cues manipulations, all participants in each experiment completed a posttest survey gauging their reactions to Chambliss across a host of evaluative measures tapping cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of participant attitudes held of Chambliss. As with the pretest, student participants in the initial study completed a more extensive posttest survey, while adult subjects in the follow-up study completed an abbreviated version. The student posttest began with a battery of 10 trait-evaluation questions asking participants to respond how well an adjective (e.g. wise, friendly, strong and moral) described the candidate. Four questions then tapped affect toward the candidate by asking participants to what extent the candidate made them feel: hopeful, angry, proud and disappointed. Student participants were then presented two 100-point feeling thermometer questions designed to gauge general evaluations of the candidate.

In addition, candidate competency was measured via five questions asking student participants how competent the candidate would be in dealing with economic, healthcare, foreign policy, education and social issues. As individuals should prefer candidates possessing similar political preferences (Downs, 1957), student participants were asked two proximity questions. A religious proximity question asked participants to what degree Chambliss shares their religious views, while a political proximity measure asked to what degree Chambliss shares their political

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<sup>17</sup> The ad was edited in three places using a video-editing program. As Chambliss was not talking to the camera in the first two edits, only “B-roll” was cut and audio edited rendering a smooth transition between frames. The third edit required a subtle “jump cut” to remove the cue. As Chambliss expressed nearly identical facial expressions between and after the phrase, the image does not appear modified. No edits were made to the cue condition.



views. Finally, student participants were asked a single vote-likelihood question ascertaining how likely they would be to vote for the candidate if they could.

Adult participants in the national follow-up study were presented a questionnaire eliciting responses to four evaluative measures of Chambliss: likelihood in voting, general evaluations, trait evaluations and candidate proximity. Specifically, adults were presented a single 10-point scale question ascertaining how likely they would be to vote for Chambliss if they could. Additionally, adult participants completed a single 100-point feeling thermometer question tapping general evaluations of Chambliss as well as four specific trait measures asking how well the adjectives wise, friendly, strong and moral described Chambliss. As with participants in the student study, adult subjects were also asked the two proximity measures asking to what extent Chambliss shared their religious and political views.

### **Differentiating Religious Dimensions**

To determine whether exposure to religious appeals results in significant priming effects and the extent to which traditionalism predicts those effects relative to one's religious affiliation or commitment, I first establish the presence of distinct religious dimensions. Since the adult study used abbreviated surveys primarily tapping measures of traditionalism, I illustrate the dimensionality of religion through an exploratory factor analysis of responses drawn from the more extensive student pretest surveys. Previous literature suggests (Layman, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008) distinct dimensions of religiosity should emerge for measures of religious traditionalism (i.e. beliefs) and commitment (i.e. behaviors).

As is evident from Table 4.1 below, factor analysis results confirm a two factor solution consistent with a traditionalism and commitment dimension.<sup>18</sup> Factors were extracted based on Eigenvalues of 1 or greater and review of a scree plot. As indicated in Table 4.1, traditionalism

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<sup>18</sup>As religious measures are ordinal, factor estimates were generated using *Mplus* (Muthen & Muthen, 2005).

and commitment, though strongly correlated ( $r=.69$ ), nevertheless tap distinct aspects of religiosity. While traditionalism is defined by one's religious beliefs, commitment reflects one's religious devotion through specific behaviors.

Table 4.1 – Religious dimensions among initial student participants

<b>Factor Analysis of Religious Measures</b>		
	Traditionalism (Beliefs)	Commitment (Behaviors)
Correlation		.69
How certain is your belief in:		
Devil	<b>.945</b>	.068
Hell	<b>.939</b>	.091
Heaven	<b>.868</b>	.161
Jesus Christ is the Son of God	<b>.859</b>	.137
God	<b>.855</b>	.172
Biblical literalism	<b>.824</b>	-.031
Fundamentalist-Progressive self placement	<b>.782</b>	.046
Views on religious tradition and practices	<b>.723</b>	.162
Frequency of Prayer	<b>.632</b>	.306
Importance of religion in your life	<b>.582</b>	.431
How often do you:		
Participate in church activities other than worship service	-.060	<b>1.000</b>
Read the Bible	.194	<b>.765</b>
Attend worship service	.409	<b>.617</b>
Eigenvalues	8.67	1.10
Note: Exploratory Factor Analysis using Weighted Least Squares estimation and Promax Rotation. Factors represent Eigenvalues greater than 1. Primary loading of a variable is indicated in bold. Analysis run on original student sample <b>Experiment #1</b> (N = 161).		

As indicated by factor loading values highlighted in bold, measures of belief certainty in various religious and Biblical concepts (e.g. God, heaven, Jesus) are primarily associated with views regarding Biblical literalism, religious tradition and one's self placement as fundamentalist to progressive. In contrast, specific measures of behaviors indicative of one's devotion or commitment to religious practices (e.g. non-worship attendance, frequency in Biblical reading) are similarly associated as a distinct religious construct. Frequency of prayer, although

commonly recognized as a behavioral measure (e.g. Olson & Warber, 2008), loads primarily on the beliefs dimensions.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, religious importance is more closely wedded to beliefs, yet demonstrates a moderate level of cross loading with behavioral aspects. Taken as a whole, however, results clearly indicate the presence of distinct religious dimensions based, in large part, on one's religious beliefs relative to religious behaviors.

### Visualizing the Distributions of Religious Commitment and Traditionalism

Indeed, factor analytic results presented above demonstrate the complex nature of religion and point to the need to consider multiple aspects of religion when analyzing potential priming effects of religious appeals on voters. Although the dimensions of traditionalism and commitment are correlated, they nonetheless tap unique aspects of one's religiosity. To illustrate the differences between traditionalism and commitment, Figure 4.2 and 4.3 below present the

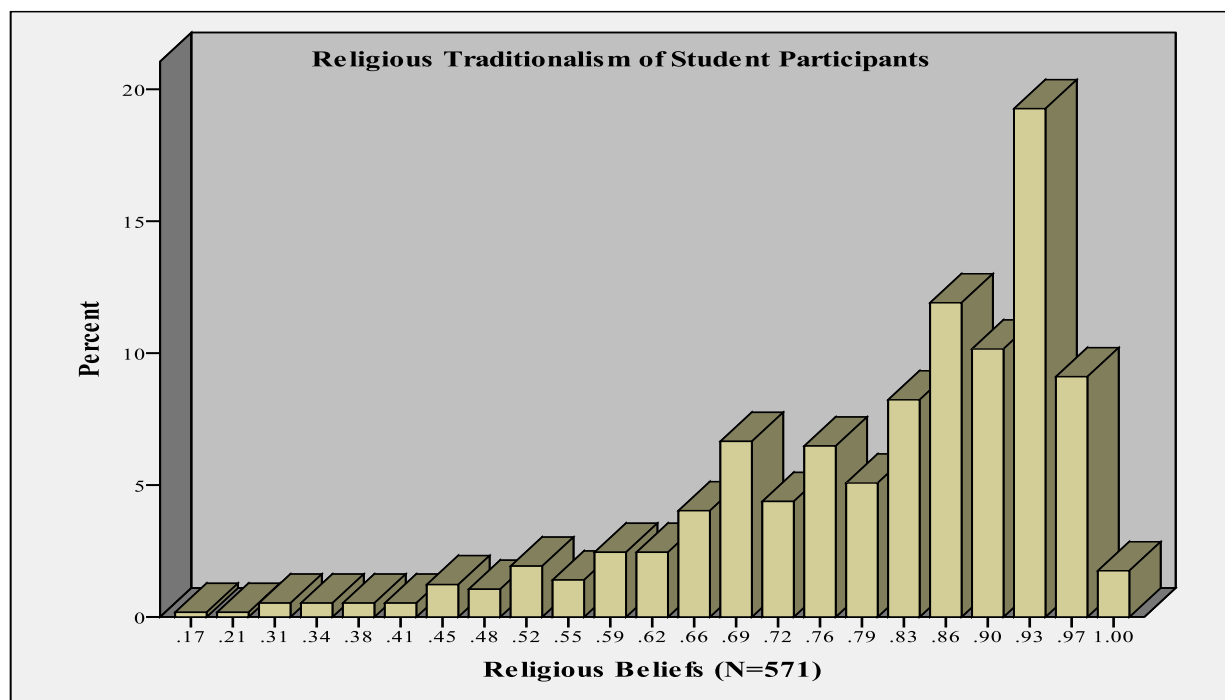


Figure 4.2 – Religious traditionalism among self-identified Christian students

<sup>19</sup> As frequency in prayer is commonly recognized as a behavioral measure, it is included in the composite commitment measure discussed later in the chapter.

distribution of religious traditionalism (i.e. beliefs) and commitment (i.e. behaviors) among self-identified Christian students.<sup>20</sup> As is evident comparing the two figures, the religious constructs produce markedly different distributions among the same group of subjects. While traditionalism is heavily skewed toward students holding relatively traditional beliefs, religious commitment approximates a normal distribution. The difference between the two dimensions illustrates why analysis of possible priming effects should consider multiple dimensions of religion, as analysis premised on only one aspect of religion may potentially mask significant priming effects.

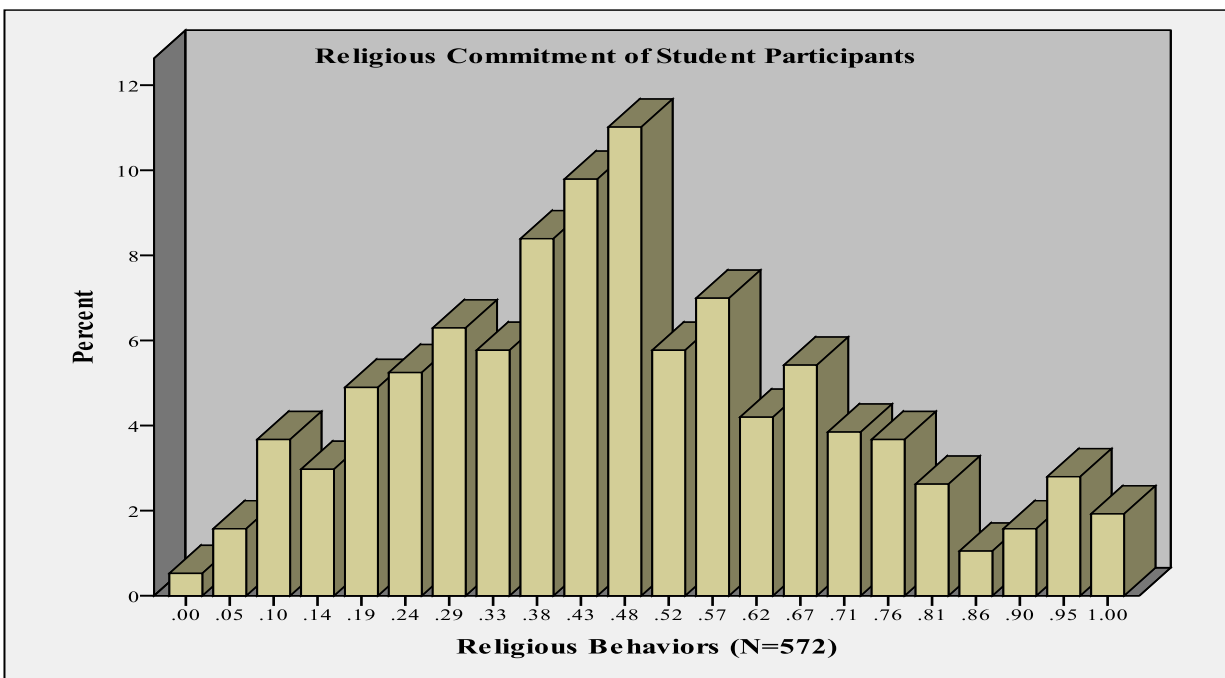


Figure 4.3 – Religious commitment among self-identified Christian students

As the factor analytic results clearly indicate, consistent with previous literature, distinct dimensions exist in terms of religious traditionalism and commitment displayed by student participants, which subsequently translates into marked differences in the distribution of each construct among Christian identifiers. Having established the dimensionality of religion among experimental participants, I now transition to analysis of the potential effects of exposure to

<sup>20</sup> Distributions for each dimension are based on index measures, which are described in more detail below.

religious appeals on voters in an effort to determine if, as hypothesized, one's level of religious traditionalism serves as a robust predictor of priming effects. Following the culture wars literature (e.g. Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001), exposure to religious appeals should activate religious considerations thus heightening the impact of one's religiosity on subsequent candidate evaluations – an effect that is expected to be most pronounced based on religious traditionalism relative to one's level of religious commitment or religious affiliation.

### **Independent and Dependent Variables**

Prior to modeling potential priming effects across various religious dimensions, I first review independent and dependent measures constructed from pre- and posttest measures drawn from Experiment #1 – the initial student-based experiment.<sup>21</sup> A caveat here is that all independent and dependent variables modeled, unless otherwise noted, are scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 coded to indicate more positive evaluations (or traditionalism). Initially, I created index variables for both religious traditionalism and commitment. To develop a measure of religious traditionalism, I combined the eight beliefs measures identified on the factor analysis of student participants (Table 4.1). Specifically, I combined the five belief certainty measures asking participants how certain their belief is in God, heaven, hell, the devil and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with the Biblical literalism question as well as their views about preserving religious practices and the single fundamentalist-progressive self-placement measure.<sup>22</sup> All items were then summed to create an internally consistent ( $\alpha=.91$ ) traditionalism index variable. A religious commitment index variable was similarly created from the three behavioral measures identified by the aforementioned factor analyses and frequency of prayer. Specifically, I combined questions tapping how often participants attended worship, attended non-worship religious

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #1 for precise question wording.

<sup>22</sup> Religious importance was excluded as it fails to tap a specific belief and it tends to cross load with commitment.

activities and how often they read the Bible with the frequency of prayer measure. The four items were then summed to create a reliable religious commitment index variable ( $\alpha=.85$ ).

The posttest completed by student participants in Experiment #1 included a host of candidate evaluative measures, which were collapsed into six dependent variables. Ten questions asking participants how well various adjectives (e.g. wise, friendly, sincere) described Saxby Chambliss were combined to create a highly reliable ( $\alpha=.92$ ) trait evaluations index variable. Two traditional 100-point thermometer scale questions were combined to form a reliable ( $r=.84$ ) general evaluation variable. A composite competency measure was created from five questions asking participants how competent Saxby Chambliss would be in dealing with (economic, health care, foreign policy, education and social) issues ( $\alpha=.88$ ). Candidate affect was tapped with four questions ( $\alpha=.78$ ) asking participants if Saxby Chambliss made them feel (hopeful, angry, proud and disappointed). As voters should prefer candidates who share their socio-political views, two items were combined to form a candidate proximity variable ( $r=.56$ ). Specifically, one question asked participants to what extent Chambliss shared their political views, while a second question asked to what extent Chambliss shared their religious views. Finally, a single question tapped likelihood in voting by asking subjects how likely they would be to vote for Chambliss if they could.

### **Modeling Religious Priming Effects by Religious Commitment**

I begin exploring potential priming effects by modeling religious commitment across the six dependent variables and then turn to modeling religious traditionalism across the same outcome measures.<sup>23</sup> According to Hypothesis 1, stronger, more consistent effects should emerge for traditionalism relative to commitment. As the present investigation is merely

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<sup>23</sup> A lack of diversity in terms of religious affiliation among student participants prohibits analysis by religious affiliation. Religious affiliation, however, is modeled among the national adult sample later in the chapter.

concerned with establishing the presence of priming effects among self-identified Christians upon exposure to religious appeals – that is in a low-information environment – analyses are restricted to the two no-information conditions.<sup>24</sup>

To test whether exposure to religious appeals activates one's religious commitment, which is subsequently applied by participants in their evaluation of Saxby Chambliss, I estimated a series of regression models. Specifically, I regressed trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote choice on a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation (i.e. the presence "1" or absence "0" of religious cues in the ad), religious commitment and the interaction of the religious cue and commitment. Table 4.2 below presents the regression estimates for these models. Cell entries for the first five models present Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimates, while the final column provides ordinal regression estimates of the ordinal vote variable. Of interest in the current investigation is the two-way, cue x commitment interaction variable, which represents the priming effect of exposure to religious appeals based on one's level of religious commitment. If exposure to religious appeals activates one's religious commitment, which subsequently heightens evaluation of Chambliss, we should observe significant, positively signed estimates for the two-way interaction.

As is evident, all six two-way estimates are positively signed indicating exposure to religious appeals results in consistently more favorable evaluations of Chambliss based on one's degree of religious commitment. Moreover, three of the six interaction estimates are statistically significant – general evaluations ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), competency ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and candidate proximity ( $\beta = .47$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Among religiously committed participants, exposure to religious appeals results in significantly more favorable general evaluations of Chambliss as well as perceptions that he is more competent in dealing with political issues.

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<sup>24</sup> Priming effects in variable information environments are addressed in the next chapter.

Likewise, the religiously committed are significantly more likely to respond that Chambliss shares their political and religious views (i.e. candidate proximity) when exposed to the advertisement possessing subtle religious cues.

Table 4.2 – Candidate evaluations by commitment among self-identified Christian students

<b>Priming by Religious Commitment among Student Participants</b>						
	<b><u>Trait</u></b> <b><u>Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General</u></b> <b><u>Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Competency</u></b>	<b><u>Affect</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate</u></b> <b><u>Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Religious Cue	-.14 (.09)	-.22* (.10)	-.31* (.12)	-.14 (.10)	-.18^ (.11)	-2.09^ (1.13)
Commitment	-.01 (.12)	-.03 (.14)	-.08 (.16)	.01 (.13)	.04 (.15)	.97 (1.55)
Cue x Commitment	.16 (.17)	.40* (.20)	.52* (.23)	.30 (.19)	.47* (.20)	3.38 (2.16)
Constant	.77** (.06)	.79** (.08)	.77** (.08)	.78** (.07)	.62** (.08)	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-3.20
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-1.13
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	1.76
N	72	72	72	72	72	72
R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.10	.13	.08	.16	

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions. ^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

To further explicate the conditional effects of commitment on evaluations of Chambliss, I plot the mean values for general evaluations (Figure 4.4) at both low and high levels of commitment. Figure 4.4 depicts the mean value of general evaluations at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of commitment among viewers in the cue and no cue conditions respectively. While there is no notable effect of religious commitment among viewers of the advertisement without religious cues, there is a significant rise in evaluations for Chambliss among progressively more committed viewers of the advertisement possessing subtle religious cues. Mean general evaluations rise from .63 for relatively non-committed religious cue viewers to .86 for deeply committed Christian viewers.



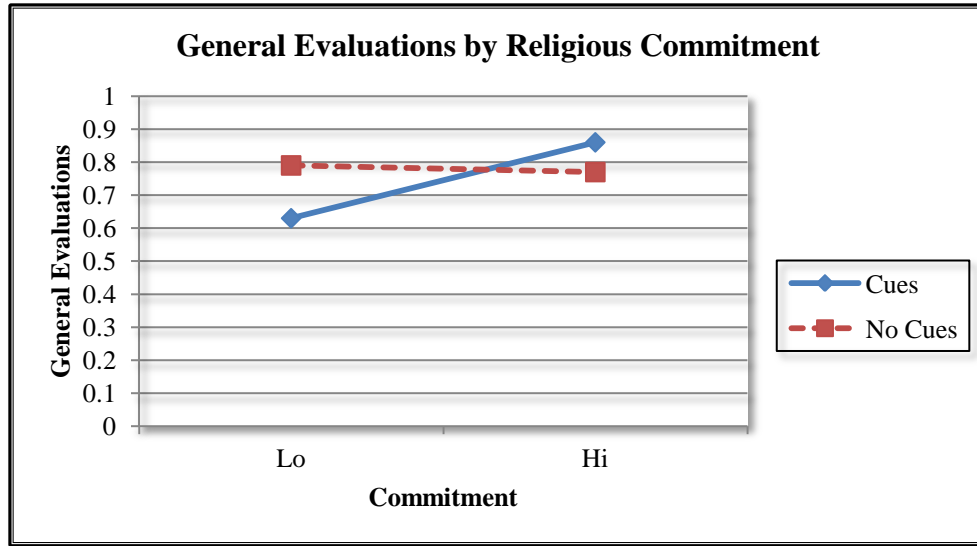


Figure 4.4 – General evaluations by religious commitment among self-identified Christian students.

Interestingly, Figure 4.4 also illustrates a modest backlash effect among relatively non-committed viewers exposed to religious cues as evidenced by differences in evaluations of Chambliss across conditions at low levels of commitment. Indeed, there is a significant negative conditional effect of religiosity at low levels of commitment (10<sup>th</sup> percentile) for general evaluations ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $SE = .075$ ,  $p < .05$ ) as well as competency ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>25</sup> That is, relatively non-committed viewers of the religious cues evaluate Chambliss significantly lower in terms of overall evaluations and competency relative to non-cue viewers possessing identical levels of religious commitment. A caveat, however, is that such effects are partially offset by a significant positive conditional effect of religiosity at high levels of commitment for evaluations of candidate proximity ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) among religious cue viewers. Although candidates may experience backlash among the uncommitted, they similarly benefit to the extent religious appeals resonate with the religiously committed.

<sup>25</sup> Regression estimates for *general evaluations* and *competency* in the religious cue condition presented in Table 4.2 above likewise confirm a decline in evaluation among uncommitted viewers. The significant negative estimates for general evaluations and competency in the religious cue condition represent the effect of cue exposure for viewers void of religious commitment.

Potential backlash effects aside, however, results indicate that exposure to religious appeals activates one's level of religious commitment, which subsequently influences evaluations of Chambliss. Individuals who frequently attend worship service or read the Bible, for example, are significantly more likely to evaluate Chambliss favorably in terms of overall evaluations and in terms of competency. Likewise, religiously committed Christians become significantly more likely to respond Chambliss shares their political and religious views (i.e. candidate proximity) upon exposure to religious cues. Religious commitment, however, fails to positively predict attitudes regarding trait evaluations, affect or likelihood in voting for Chambliss. Nonetheless, one's degree of religious commitment as measured by various religious behaviors serves as a reasonably effective criterion to evaluate the possible presence of religious priming effects.

### **Modeling Religious Priming Effects by Religious Traditionalism**

Recall, however, drawing on culture wars literature, one's religious beliefs should serve as a more diagnostic dimension of potential priming effects resulting from exposure to religious appeals. Thus, I turn to modeling the same dependent variables by religious traditionalism. Consistent with the aforementioned religious commitment analysis, I performed a series of models regressing trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote choice on a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation, religious traditionalism and the interaction of the religious cue and traditionalism (cue x traditionalism).

Regression estimates for these models are displayed in Table 4.3 below, with cell entries providing OLS estimates for the five continuous variables and ordinal regression estimates for the categorical vote variable. In this case, we are interested in the interactive effect between the cue and traditionalism (i.e. cue x traditionalism), which represents the priming effect of exposure

to religious appeals based on one's level of religious traditionalism. If Hypothesis 1 is correct, we should observe significant positively signed estimates for the two-way interaction, thus indicating exposure to religious appeals to activate participant traditionalism resulting in a significant influence on evaluations of Saxby Chambliss.

Table 4.3 – Candidate evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students

<b>Priming by Religious Traditionalism among Student Participants</b>						
	<b><u>Trait</u></b> <b><u>Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General</u></b> <b><u>Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Competency</u></b>	<b><u>Affect</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate</u></b> <b><u>Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Religious Cue	-.46* (.21)	-.80** (.23)	-.96** (.27)	-.40^ (.23)	-.56* (.24)	-5.53** (1.79)
Traditionalism	-.18 (.21)	-.20 (.24)	-.36 (.28)	.001 (.24)	.12 (.25)	-1.55 (1.79)
Cue x Traditionalism	.49^ (.26)	.96** (.28)	1.13** (.33)	.50^ (.28)	.74** (.30)	6.23** (2.23)
Constant	.91** (.17)	.93** (.19)	1.02** (.22)	.78** (.19)	.55** (.20)	
Threshold 1						-4.96
Threshold 2						-2.97
Threshold 3						-.88
N	72	72	72	72	72	72
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.27	.24	.13	.29	

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions. ^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

A cursory examination of the results in Table 4.3 demonstrates the two-way, cue x traditionalism variable to be positively signed and significant across all six evaluative measures. Four of the six variables achieve robust levels of statistical significance – general evaluations ( $\beta = .96$ , SE = .28,  $p < .01$ ), competency ( $\beta = 1.13$ , SE = .33,  $p < .01$ ), proximity ( $\beta = .74$ , SE = .30,  $p < .01$ ) and vote ( $\beta = 6.23$ , SE = 2.23,  $p < .01$ ) – while trait evaluations ( $\beta = .49$ , SE = .26,  $p < .10$ ), and affect ( $\beta = .50$ , SE = .28,  $p < .10$ ) demonstrate marginal levels of significance. Results provide clear, consistent evidence that exposure to religious appeals activates traditionalism, which

subsequently informs viewers' evaluations of Chambliss. Those participants adhering to traditional religious beliefs evaluate Chambliss more favorably across all evaluative dimensions upon exposure to the "Values" ad incorporating the three subtle religious cues. Moreover, consistent with hypothesized expectations (H1), priming effects are more pronounced for measures of religious traditionalism relative to one's religious commitment. In essence, one's religious beliefs (e.g. whether they observe a literal interpretation of scripture) are more diagnostic of priming effects relative to their religious practices (e.g. church attendance).

In an effort to further examine the conditional influence of traditionalism on evaluations of Chambliss, I plot the mean values for outcome measures across conditions. For parsimony, effects for general evaluations (Figure 4.5) and vote (Figure 4.6) preference are presented as illustrative of the general significant effect of traditionalism across all dependent variables. Figure 4.5 displays the mean value of general evaluations at low (10<sup>th</sup> percentile) and high (90<sup>th</sup> percentile) levels of traditionalism in both experimental conditions.

While there is no significant effect of traditionalism on general evaluations of Chambliss among viewers of the appeal without religious cues, a highly significant effect emerges for traditionalism among viewers of the ad with religious cues. The mean value of general evaluations at low levels of traditionalism, .59, rises to .85 for highly traditional viewers exposed to the campaign appeal with religious cues. In contrast, general evaluations for Chambliss are effectively unchanged across levels of traditionalism among viewers of the ad without the religious cues – .82 at low levels of traditionalism and .75 at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism. The results thus indicate the subtle religious cues in the campaign ad to activate religious beliefs, which subsequently influence the perceptions viewers hold of Chambliss. Absent the cues, however, religious traditionalism plays little role in general evaluations of Chambliss.

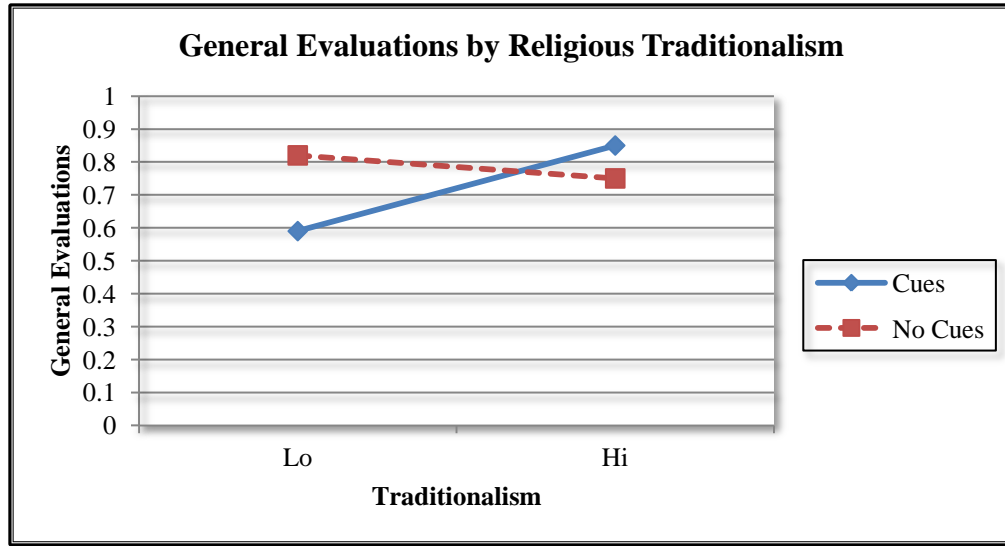


Figure 4.5 – General evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students

A similar effect is observed for likelihood in voting for Chambliss. Since the vote preference variable is categorical, Figure 4.6 presents the predicted probability of a participant selecting the most extreme category (i.e. “very likely” to vote for Chambliss if they could) across levels of traditionalism among viewers in each condition. As demonstrated by the solid line, as traditionalism rises, viewers of the ad with religious cues become much more likely to vote for Chambliss if the opportunity presented itself. The probability of participants exposed to the ad with religious cues responding they would be very likely to vote for Chambliss increases from effectively 0 for extreme progressives to 51% for highly traditional respondents. Much like the effect for general evaluations noted above, exposure to religious cues makes one’s religious beliefs salient, which subsequently influence the perceptions individuals formulate of Chambliss. While progressives rate Chambliss much less favorably, traditionalists respond with more favorable evaluations of Chambliss.

Among those exposed to the campaign appeal without religious cues (the dashed line), there is a notable decline in vote preference for Chambliss across levels of traditionalism.

Although the negative effect does not reach statistical significance, it is interesting to note progressives in the no-cue condition are more likely to vote for Chambliss relative to more traditional participants. This result, however, reflects a modest number of ideologically conservative subjects observing less traditional religious beliefs – an artifact that stems from using subjects drawn from a relatively conservative college student population.

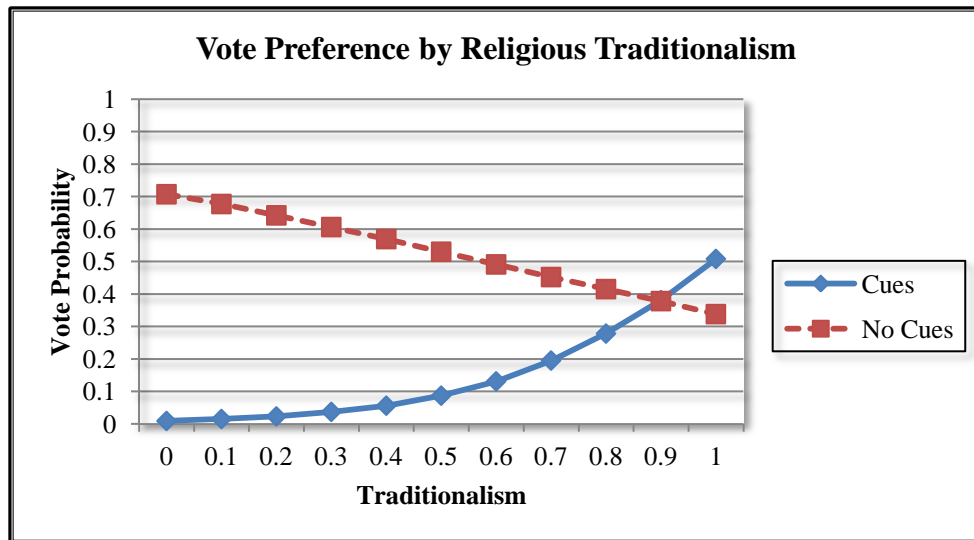


Figure 4.6 – Vote preference by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students

Of greater interest from a strategic perspective is the marked decline in evaluations of Chambliss within the cue condition among less traditional participants. As illustrated in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 and as noted in the discussion of the commitment models, exposure to the religious cues often results in pronounced negative effects among more moderate and progressive participants when compared to moderates and progressives in the no-cue conditions. Moreover, the negative effect occurring at lower levels of traditionalism is often far larger than the positive effect occurring at higher levels of traditionalism. Consider, in terms of vote preference as illustrated in Figure 4.6, it is not until the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism that the probability of vote in the cue condition exceeds the probability among participants exposed to the ad without

the religious cues. Likewise, for general evaluations illustrated in Figure 4.5, a positive effect across conditions does not emerge until approximately the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism. In essence, for religious cue viewers, the magnitude of the negative effect at lower levels of traditionalism often exceeds the beneficial effects at higher levels of traditionalism.

Table 4.4 below helps demonstrate this aspect by presenting the conditional effect of traditionalism on each of the continuous dependent variables at various levels of traditionalism.<sup>26</sup> Cell entries provide the effect size of traditionalism across conditions with corresponding standard errors in parentheses. For all variables, there is a negative effect of traditionalism at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile and below, which is statistically significant for three of the five variables. Across conditions, there is a significant difference in trait and general evaluations as well as competency for Chambliss at lower levels of traditionalism with individuals exposed to the ad with religious cues demonstrating much less favorable evaluations of Chambliss.

Table 4.4 – Conditional effect of traditionalism on dependent measures among self-identified Christian students

<b>Conditional Effect of Traditionalism on Candidate Evaluations</b>					
<b>Tradition Level</b>	<b>Trait Evaluations</b>	<b>General Evaluations</b>	<b>Competency</b>	<b>Affect</b>	<b>Candidate Proximity</b>
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>-.17</b> (.07)	<b>-.23</b> (.07)	<b>-.30</b> (.08)	-.11 (.07)	-.12 (.07)
<b>25<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>-.10</b> (.04)	<b>-.10</b> (.04)	<b>-.15</b> (.05)	-.04 (.04)	-.02 (.05)
<b>50<sup>th</sup></b>	-.05 (.04)	-.001 (.04)	-.03 (.05)	.01 (.04)	.05 (.04)
<b>75<sup>th</sup></b>	-.01 (.04)	.07 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.05 (.05)	<b>.10</b> (.05)
<b>90<sup>th</sup></b>	.003 (.05)	.10 (.05)	.09 (.06)	.07 (.05)	<b>.13</b> (.06)

Note: Cell entries provide the effect of traditionalism across conditions at indicated levels of traditionalism for trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect and candidate proximity among a student sample. Standard errors are provided in parentheses. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions. Bold entries p<.05.

<sup>26</sup> Conditional effects of traditionalism were generated using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012).

Moreover, for only one variable – candidate proximity – is there a statistically significant positive effect of traditionalism. In essence, only in terms of candidate proximity does exposure to the campaign appeal possessing religious cues result in significantly more favorable evaluations of Chambliss compared to subjects viewing the ad absent religious cues. From such a perspective, the case for strategic benefit of incorporating religious cues in political appeals is decidedly mixed. Although religious cues resonate with viewers potentially improving perceptions of candidates among traditionalists, exposure to religious cues is just as likely – if not more so – to result in a significant reduction in evaluations among less religiously traditional viewers. It can certainly be argued that relative progressives are not likely to support overly conservative candidates to begin with, thus the potential downside of employing religious cues is partially mitigated for politically conservative candidates. Nonetheless, much more favorable evaluations of Saxby Chambliss among progressive viewers of the campaign appeal without religious cues should give pause to potential candidates considering employing religious appeals in campaign ads – at least to the extent ads are to be presented to younger voters.

### **Religious Priming Effects by Religious Traditionalism among U.S. adults**

Having demonstrated religious priming effects among a non-representative student sample, I attempt to extend these effects to a nationally-representative sample of adults. Confirming priming effects on a national cross section of adults would achieve two important aspects. First, substantiating initial findings strengthens reliability in the use of student samples in religious priming experiments as well as overall study results. Second, replication of effects among a nationally-representative sample dramatically improves external validity in demonstrating the potential for priming effects among Christian voters exposed to religious appeals in the electorate at large.



As discussed above, the initial 2 x 2, between-subjects experiment administered to an LSU student sample was also conducted on a national cross section of U.S. adults. A small *Time Sharing Experiment for the Social Sciences (TESS)* grant was secured to fund the national study, which was fielded by *Knowledge Networks* on a representative panel of participants (N = 562) in August of 2010. As noted above, the follow-up study employed identical Saxby Chambliss information and religious cue manipulations as those used in the initial student experiment. The national adult study, however, used abbreviated survey instruments<sup>27</sup> in an effort to maximize sample size. While the student study included six dependent variables, only questions tapping four outcome measures were included on the adult posttest questionnaire. Likewise, the adult pretest primarily included religious measures tapping traditionalism, as traditionalism was shown to be more diagnostic of political evaluations among the student sample.

Specifically, and as detailed above, four pretest measures comprised the traditionalism index measure for the adult sample ( $\alpha = .82$ ): a question asking participants their views on Biblical literalism; a question based on the Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics (2004) asking respondents to describe their views about religious traditionalism; a third question tapping participants' fundamentalist versus progressive orientation; and a final question ascertaining respondents' degree of certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

In terms of dependent measures, four questions tapped trait evaluations by asking participants how well the terms qualified, moral, dishonest and strong describe Chambliss on a scale from "extremely well" to "not well at all." The four items were recoded and combined to form an additive trait evaluations measure ( $\alpha = .86$ ). A single 100-point thermometer scale question asking how much participants liked Saxby Chambliss served as a measure of general evaluations. Likewise, a single question tapped vote likelihood by asking participants how likely

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #2 for specific questions.

they would be to vote for Chambliss if they could on a scale from 0 to 10. As with the initial student experiment, the adult posttest included two proximity measures asking subjects how much Chambliss shared their political and religious views. The two measures were summed to create a composite candidate proximity variable ( $r = .73$ ).

Consistent with earlier analyses, a series of models were performed by regressing the four dependent measures – trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote preference – on a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation, religious traditionalism and the interaction of the religious cue and traditionalism (cue x traditionalism).<sup>28</sup> Results are displayed in Table 4.5 below with cell entries providing OLS estimates for the four outcome variables. Replication of initial study results takes the form of positively signed, significant interaction effects between cue exposure and traditionalism (i.e. cue x traditionalism), which indicates exposure to religious cues to significantly influence evaluations of Chambliss upon activation of traditionalism among experimental subjects.

Consistent with results drawn on the initial student sample, adults demonstrate a similar effect upon exposure to the Chambliss ad possessing religious cues. The significant interactive effects produced across all four evaluative constructs – trait evaluations ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p < .10$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = .53$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) – indicate exposure to subtle religious cues to activate traditionalism, which subsequently influences evaluations of Chambliss. It is consistently the case across students and adults alike that religiosity plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes of Chambliss upon exposure to the campaign advertisement incorporating religious cues. Deeply religious individuals, especially those adhering to traditional religious beliefs, consistently rate Chambliss more favorably once exposed to religious appeals. Simply put, appeals invoking

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<sup>28</sup> Once again, analyses are restricted to the no-information conditions of the experiment.

religious themes and imagery are consequential in shaping the perceptions of a candidate based on a viewer's religiosity, especially one's level of religious traditionalism.

Table 4.5 – Candidate evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christian adults

<b>Priming by Religious Traditionalism among Adult Participants</b>				
	<b>Trait Evaluations</b>	<b>General Evaluations</b>	<b>Candidate Proximity</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Religious Cue	-.08 (.09)	-.32* (.13)	-.25* (.11)	-.35* (.14)
Traditionalism	.25** (.08)	.26* (.12)	.35** (.10)	.24* (.12)
Cue x Traditionalism	.19^ (.11)	.48** (.17)	.39** (.14)	.53** (.18)
Constant	.46** (.06)	.41** (.09)	.35** (.07)	.39** (.09)
N	211	212	209	212
R <sup>2</sup>	.18	.17	.24	.16

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote choice among a nationally representative adult sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions.

^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

To further illustrate the importance of traditionalism in shaping perceptions of Chambliss among adult viewers, the conditional effects of traditionalism for trait evaluations and vote preference are graphically presented below. Figures 4.7 and 4.8 display mean values for each dependent variable at low (10<sup>th</sup> percentile) and high (90<sup>th</sup>) levels of traditionalism across conditions. Consider trait evaluations illustrated in Figure 4.7. As the no-cue (dashed) line illustrates, trait evaluations for Chambliss rise across levels of traditionalism (.57 to .69) even among viewers of the ad without the religious cues. For viewers of the ad with religious cues, however, the effect is magnified as evidenced by the steeper cues (solid) line. Exposure to religious cues activates religious traditionalism resulting in a significant rise in trait evaluations of Chambliss; mean values climb from .57 for progressives to .78 among traditionalists. Moreover, as illustrated in Figure 4.7, at no point on the chart is the mean trait evaluation of

Chambliss lower among religious cue viewers, thus suggesting the ad with religious cues only benefits Chambliss in terms of heightened perceptions of trait evaluations.

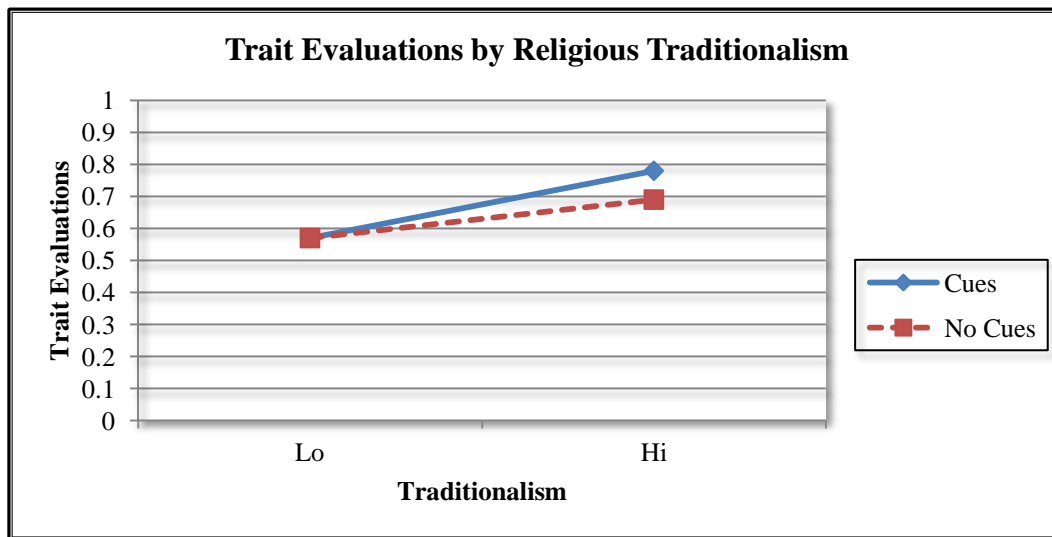


Figure 4.7 – Trait evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christians

Similar effects emerge for general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote preference (Figure 4.8) in that exposure to religious cues heightens the impact of traditionalism on evaluations of Chambliss. In terms of vote preference, for example, the mean value rises from .50 to .61 across levels of traditionalism among viewers of the ad without religious cues. For viewers of the appeal with religious cues, however, the mean value climbs from .40 to .76 across levels of religious traditionalism. Deeply traditional viewers exposed to the ad become significantly more likely to vote for Chambliss if presented the opportunity.

In contrast to trait evaluations, however, progressives are associated with a modest decline in general evaluations and vote preference for Chambliss among religious cue viewers. Unlike the pronounced conditional negative effects of traditionalism observed in the original student study, however, the negative effects among adult progressives are much more modest. Moreover, the gains in evaluations at higher levels of traditionalism observed of adults more than offset the modest negative effects among relative progressives exposed to the religious cues.

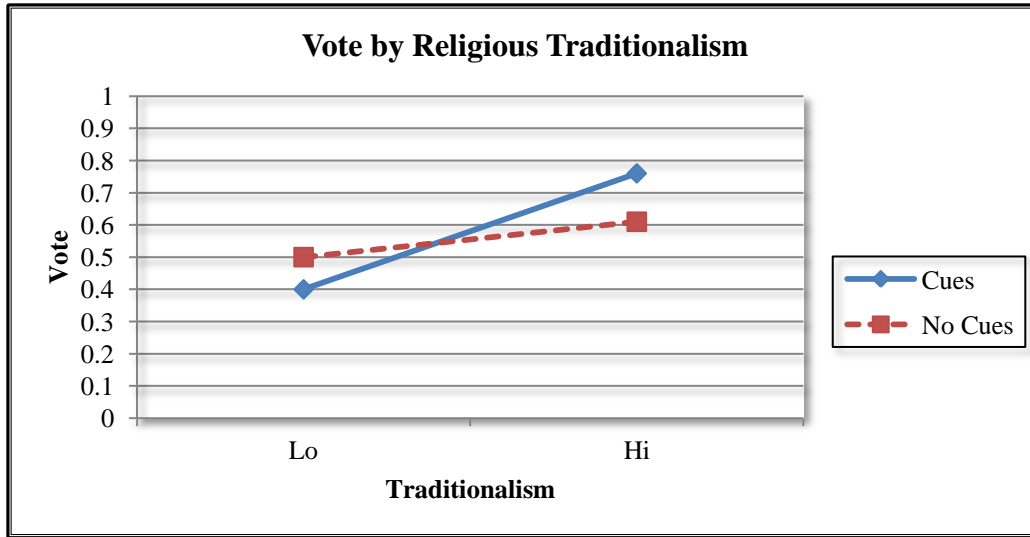


Figure 4.8 – Vote by traditionalism among self-identified Christians

Table 4.6 below presents the conditional effects of traditionalism on each evaluative dimension of Chambliss for adult participants. Cell entries provide the effect size at various levels of traditionalism with standard errors in parentheses. Although three of the four measures demonstrate negative effects at lower levels of traditionalism (i.e. 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentile), unlike student participants, none of the effects reaches statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in the adult study. Moreover, as noted above, the conditional effect of traditionalism for trait evaluations is never negative across the range of traditionalism presented, thus implying religious cues only improve trait evaluations of Chambliss for those above the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism.

Most striking, however, are the consistent, positive effects observed at higher levels of traditionalism across all evaluations of Chambliss. Recall, a significant positive effect of traditionalism emerged for only one variable – candidate proximity – among the student sample. As is evident from Table 4.6, the effect of traditionalism is significant and pronounced for all four measures of Chambliss at higher levels of religiosity for adults. Whereas exposure to the cue was likely to produce a net negative effect among students, exposure to the cues among adults appears to produce more consistent positive effects on evaluations of Chambliss when

compared to viewers of the campaign appeal without religious cues. From a strategic standpoint, results thus suggest the incorporation of religious cues in campaign ads to be potentially beneficial in promoting improved evaluations of prospective candidates among adults.

Table 4.6 – Conditional effect of traditionalism on dependent measures among self-identified Christian adults.

<b>Conditional Effect of Traditionalism on Candidate Evaluations</b>				
<b><u>Tradition Level</u></b>	<b><u>Trait Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	.002 (.04)	-.10 (.06)	-.06 (.05)	-.10 (.06)
<b>25<sup>th</sup></b>	.03 (.03)	-.03 (.04)	.003 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
<b>50<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.06</b> <b>(.02)</b>	.05 (.04)	<b>.06</b> <b>(.03)</b>	.06 (.04)
<b>75<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.09</b> <b>(.03)</b>	<b>.08</b> <b>(.04)</b>	<b>.12</b> <b>(.04)</b>	<b>.10</b> <b>(.04)</b>
<b>90<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.09</b> <b>(.03)</b>	<b>.12</b> <b>(.05)</b>	<b>.12</b> <b>(.04)</b>	<b>.14</b> <b>(.05)</b>

Note: Cell entries provide the effect of traditionalism across conditions at indicated levels of traditionalism for trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote among a national adult sample. Standard errors are provided in parentheses. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions. Bold entries p<.05.

Indeed, the results make clear, exposure to religious appeals primes religious traditionalism among viewers leading to significantly more favorable evaluations of Chambliss among relative traditionalists. Moreover, priming effects are much more pronounced for measures of religious traditionalism relative to one's level of religious commitment. Consistent with a corpus of literature demonstrating traditionalism to be more diagnostic across a host of political behaviors (e.g. Hammond et al., 1994; Guth et al., 2006; Layman, 2001), traditionalism similarly emerges as a robust predictor of religious priming effects.

### **Modeling Religious Priming Effects by Religious Affiliation among U.S. Adults**

As a final test of the predictive power of traditionalism relative to other religious dimensions, I examine religious priming effects by affiliation. As noted above, the lack of

diversity across religious traditions in the initial student sample prevented analysis based on affiliation. The national adult sample, however, provides the necessary diversity to test priming effects across major religious traditions. Recall, the historical divisions between major religious traditions, especially Protestants and Catholics (Herberg, 1995), have given way to profound intra-denominational differences between those embracing more orthodox doctrinal positions relative to individuals adhering to more progressive beliefs (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988). Indeed, scholars have increasingly opted to examine alternative dimensions of religion predicated on measurement of beliefs or behaviors as affiliation has waned in its ability to predict political behavior (Layman, 1997; Olson & Warber, 2008).

Given the inability of religious affiliation to reliably predict political behavior, analysis of priming effects across religious traditions should yield less conclusive results relative to those emerging for measures of traditionalism presented above. To test the relative ability of religious traditions to predict religious priming effects, I performed a series of models regressing trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote choice on a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation, a dummy variable corresponding to whether the participant is Protestant (1) or Catholic (0) and the interaction of the religious cue and affiliation (i.e. cue x Protestant). I opted to test the effects for Protestants vs. Catholics owing to the historical division between the religious traditions (Herberg, 1995), and the fact the traditions together capture the majority of Christian voters in the electorate.

The results of the regression models are presented in Table 4.7 below. Only participants in the no-information conditions were modeled. Cell entries provide OLS estimates and standard errors for each dependent variable. As with earlier analyses, interest focuses on the two-way

interaction, in this case between the cue and participant affiliation (cue x Protestant), which represents the influence of exposure to religious cues across the two major religious traditions.

Table 4.7 - Candidate evaluations by self-identified Protestants and Catholics

<b>Priming by Religious Affiliation</b>				
	<b><u>Trait Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Religious Cue	.01 (.04)	-.03 (.07)	-.05 (.06)	-.003 (.07)
Protestant	-.01 (.04)	.03 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	.03 (.07)
Cue x Protestant	.10^ (.06)	.12 (.08)	.18* (.08)	.11 (.09)
Constant	.63** (.03)	.58** (.05)	.61** (.04)	.53** (.05)
N	170	172	166	171
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.04	.07	.04

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote choice among a nationally representative adult sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. Protestant variable is dummy coded with “1” indicating Protestant and “0” representing Catholic. Analysis conducted on no-information conditions. ^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

If Catholic or Protestant identification alone is determinant of religious priming effects, significant effects should emerge for the two-way, cue x Protestant variable. Coding of the variable dictates a positively signed estimate to indicate more favorable evaluations among self-identified Protestants, while a negatively signed coefficient suggests more favorable evaluations among Catholic identifiers. As is evident, estimates across all four variables are positively signed, while two estimates achieve at least a modest level of significance – trait evaluations ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .10$ ) and candidate proximity ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The estimates thus indicate Protestants to hold more favorable attitudes of Chambliss upon exposure to the religious ad relative to Catholic viewers. Protestants are significantly more likely to believe Chambliss shares their views and modestly more likely to hold favorable trait evaluations of Chambliss after viewing the ad incorporating the subtle religious cues. Figure 4.9 below illustrates these effects



by presenting the mean values for trait evaluations and candidate proximity for Catholics and Protestants among viewer and non-viewers of the religious cues. While mean values for both variables are relatively stable for Catholic cue and non-cue viewers, mean values among Protestants increase significantly among those exposed to the ad with religious appeals.

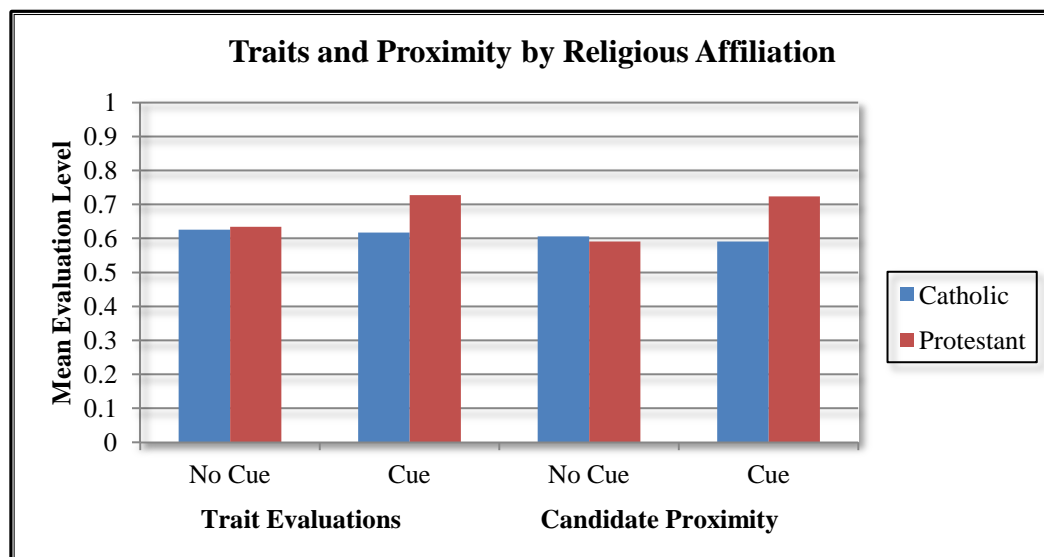


Figure 4.9 – Trait evaluations and proximity by religious affiliation

Although one's affiliation as Catholic or Protestant predicts measures of trait evaluations and proximity, affiliation fails to successfully predict overall candidate evaluations or vote preference for Chambliss. As expected, affiliation provides an inconsistent diagnostic dimension of religiosity when compared to traditionalism, as evidenced by the consistent significant findings of traditionalism across all evaluative measures of Chambliss noted above. Nevertheless, the affiliation analysis provides, to some degree, evidence of division between the religious traditions in terms of political perceptions related to Chambliss.

## Conclusion

The current chapter sought to establish whether exposure to religious appeals produces significant priming effects in a low-information environment – that is, whether simply viewing campaign appeals possessing religious symbols and rhetoric makes religiosity salient, thereby

leading to changes in how individuals evaluate politicians. A corpus of research has demonstrated the ability of media exposure to influence the attitudes individuals hold of political figures and policies (e.g. Goidel et al., 1997; Hetherington, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Mendelberg, 2001). Consistent with this literature, statistical analyses provide strong evidence that exposure to religious appeals activates religious considerations among viewers, which significantly influence how individuals perceive political candidates. As demonstrated, these effects emerge in experiments administered to a college student sample as well as a nationally-representative cross section of adults. The consistency of priming effects across differing populations bolsters the case of priming effects likely to be observed of religious appeals employed during political campaigns.

Moreover, although significant priming effects emerge for differing dimensions of religiosity, it is consistently the case that observed effects are more pronounced based on one's level of traditionalism – that is, the degree to which a viewer adheres to orthodox religious beliefs. Study results are thus congruent with previous research noting a marked shift away from historical division between religious traditions and toward a growing orthodox vs. liberal divide within denominations (e.g. Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Olson & Warber, 2008; Wuthnow, 1988). As the experimental findings demonstrate, it is the nature of one's religious beliefs that determines greater susceptibility to religious priming effects relative to one's religious affiliation or behaviors. Put differently, in terms of isolating potential religious priming effects, it matters far more whether one embraces a literal interpretation of Biblical scripture than whether he or she happens to self identify as Protestant or Catholic or even the frequency with which they happen to attend church or read the Bible.

Taken as a whole, the analytical results discussed throughout this chapter confirm the complex, multi-dimensional nature of religion and, more importantly, demonstrate the consequential role religion serves in informing individual political behavior. The manner in which religion exerts influence on political behavior is best captured by one's level of traditionalism. As evidenced by estimates drawn on a national sample of adults, traditionalism, regardless of exposure to religious cues, significantly influences the manner in which individuals evaluate political candidates. More importantly, however, the effect of traditionalism on subsequent political evaluations becomes magnified upon exposure to campaign advertisements incorporating subtle religious rhetoric. Across student and adult samples alike, results consistently confirm that exposure to religious appeals heightens the impact of individual religiosity leading to significant shifts in perceptions, with increasing levels of traditionalism resulting in much more favorable attitudes held of an ad-sponsored candidate. Simply put, religion matters when evaluating candidates, and it matters even more to the extent prospective voters are primed to draw on their religious beliefs in formulating political perceptions.

Having clearly confirmed the effectiveness of religious campaign appeals to alter individual political evaluations in a low-information environment – that is, in the context of brief exposure to a single, non-partisan political ad – I now consider the relative effectiveness of religious appeals in the context of variable information environments. As prospective voters are often overloaded with competing information flows, especially in the context of high-stakes, competitive campaigns, it is imperative to evaluate the potential effect of alternative political information on religious appeals to further explicate the strategic effects of religiously-infused campaigns.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRIMING IN A NON-PARTISAN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Chapter Overview**

Political appeals do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they occur in diverse media environments. Indeed, as campaign appeals are but a small portion of the information likely to be conveyed throughout the course of a campaign, it is of interest to examine how religious appeals operate in the context of information-rich environments to more accurately ascertain the effects of religious appeals likely to emerge in an actual campaign. Although the results of the previous chapter clearly demonstrate pronounced effects of exposure to a religious appeal when little is known of the candidate, it remains unclear how the presence of additional information characteristic of competitive campaigns may alter potential priming effects.

The current chapter, therefore, examines the effect of non-partisan, secular political information on religious priming effects. Recall, the information-environment hypothesis (H2) proposes that individual religious priming effects will be reduced in a complex information environment relative to priming effects observed in an impoverished information environment. In essence, the presence of additional political information disseminated in campaigns is likely to attenuate the priming effects of religious appeals.

To test the potential moderating effects of non-partisan candidate information on religious appeals, Chapter 5 draws on the aforementioned Saxby Chambliss experiments by extending the traditionalism models presented in the previous chapter. While the prior chapter only included analyses of the no-information conditions, expanded models in the present chapter incorporate the information conditions thereby permitting examination of the influence of secular, non-partisan political information on religious priming effects. The chapter begins with a brief review of the Saxby Chambliss experiments, and then presents findings from a series of

statistical models that provide persuasive evidence that the presence of non-religious information significantly attenuates religious priming effects. When faced with a relatively complex environment presenting politically relevant information of a candidate, participants exposed to religious appeals become less reliant on their religious beliefs in formulating subsequent political attitudes. Absent additional secular information, participants exposed to religious appeals become heavily dependent on religion as a standard to evaluate a candidate. Following discussion of the moderating effects of secular, non-partisan information on priming effects, the chapter concludes with a brief summation of substantive findings.

### **Non-partisan Information Effects – Experimental Procedures**

To examine the potential for complex, non-partisan information environments to attenuate religious priming effects, I rely on the two Saxby Chambliss experiments detailed in the previous chapter. In so doing, I additionally incorporate the information conditions to create expanded models examining the influence of the information manipulations on subsequent evaluations of Chambliss. To review, both the original student experiment and the adult online experiment employed a 2 (Prior Information: Present, Absent) x 2 (Religious Appeals: Present, Absent) condition, pretest-posttest design with each experiment employing identical Saxby Chambliss stimuli. While analyses in the previous chapter focused on the no-information conditions to isolate the effects of mere exposure to religious cues on individual evaluations of Chambliss, the current investigation also incorporates participants exposed to the Chambliss web site (i.e. the information manipulation) prior to ad exposure. By presenting or not presenting participants with additional political information of the candidate prior to ad exposure, the web site manipulation varies the complexity of the participant's information environment thereby

providing the ability to test the information-environment hypothesis, that is the extent to which complex information environments attenuate the priming effects of religious appeals.

Given the diagnostic strength of traditionalism to predict religious priming effects as consistently demonstrated in earlier analyses of the religious appeals factor, I similarly employ traditionalism as a measure of religiosity in expanded models exploring the effects of the information manipulation. In keeping with earlier analyses, expanded models incorporating information manipulation effects examine potential influences across the six dependent measures included on the student posttest as well as the four outcome variables covered on the abbreviated posttest administered adults in the national online study. Specifically, models drawn on the initial student sample (Experiment #1) examine potential effects on measures of trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote preference for Saxby Chambliss. Likewise, analysis of the national adult sample (Experiment #2) examines measures of trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote preference for Chambliss.<sup>29</sup>

### **Modeling Variable Information Effects on Religious Priming among a Student Sample**

To explicate possible moderating effects arising in complex information environments, I first model information influences on posttest evaluative measures provided by students in Experiment #1. According to H2, religious priming effects should be reduced in complex information environments relative to the effects observed in low information environments. To test this hypothesis, I estimated a series of regression models in which trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote preference for Saxby Chambliss were regressed on religious traditionalism, a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation (coded 1 for exposure and 0 for non-exposure), a dummy variable corresponding to

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 4 for detailed discussion of posttest evaluative measures for student and adult experiments.

whether the participant was exposed (1) or not exposed (0) to the information manipulation and all subsequent two and three way interactions (Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003).

Recall from analyses in the previous chapter, a significant two-way, cue x traditionalism estimate is interpreted as evidence of religious priming in that exposure to religious cues activates participant religiosity resulting in marked influences on candidate evaluations. In effect, exposure to political ads including religious appeals heightens the impact of religiosity on subsequent perceptions of Saxby Chambliss. The current investigation further incorporates whether participants are first exposed to secular information about Chambliss' policy positions across a host of political issues (denoted by the dummy *information* variable) prior to ad exposure. If prior non-religious information influences the priming effect of religiosity on attitudes toward Chambliss, we should observe a significant estimate of the three-way, cue x information x traditionalism variable. While coding of model variables dictates that a positively signed, two-way cue x traditionalism interaction provides evidence of religious priming effects in that religious cue exposure yields more favorable evaluations of Chambliss, a negatively signed, three-way cue x information x traditionalism interaction is taken as evidence of reduced priming effects. In essence, the introduction of prior non-religious candidate information serves to blunt the effects of religiosity on evaluations as participants presented the candidate web site possess more diverse information to draw on in formulating opinions of Chambliss.

Estimates for specified regression models are presented in Table 5.1 below.<sup>30</sup> Cell entries for the first five models provide OLS estimates, while the last column presents ordinal regression estimates of the categorical vote variable. Consistent with earlier analysis of the base traditionalism models presented in Chapter 4, the two-way, cue x traditionalism estimates are

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<sup>30</sup> Consistent with regression models presented in Chapter 4, analysis is restricted to Christian identifiers given that religious measures are primarily designed to tap Christian beliefs (e.g. belief certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God) and the fact that most religious political appeals are specifically designed to resonate with Christian voters.

positively signed across all dependent measures. Moreover, all estimates once again achieve statistical significance – trait evaluations ( $\beta = .49$ ,  $SE = .26$ ,  $p < .10$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta = .96$ ,  $SE = .30$ ,  $p < .01$ ), competency ( $\beta = 1.13$ ,  $SE = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), affect ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $SE = .28$ ,  $p < .10$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta = .74$ ,  $SE = .31$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = 6.18$ ,  $SE = 2.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The consistency of significance across all variables strongly suggests marked religious priming effects for those exposed to the Chambliss ad with religious cues. The presence of religious cues serves to prime religious beliefs, which are then drawn on in forming perceptions of Chambliss. Those adhering to more orthodox religious beliefs consistently evaluate Chambliss more favorably upon exposure to the religious appeal absent any additional candidate information.

A caveat to the pronounced priming effects, however, is the unknown influence extraneous political information may exert on religious priming effects. In isolation, exposure to religious political appeals produces substantial effects on candidate evaluations, but it remains to be seen how durable such effects are in the context of information-rich environments realistic of modern campaigns. Thus, we now turn to the effects of prior information on priming effects in the form of the three way, cue x information x traditionalism interaction. Once again, negative estimates of the three way variable are indicative that prior information reduces the priming effect of exposure to religious cues.

Consistent with hypothesized expectation, estimates for the three way, cue x information x traditionalism variable are negatively signed across all six dependent measures, with four of six estimates at least modestly statistically significant – trait evaluations ( $\beta = -.58$ ,  $SE = .35$ ,  $p < .10$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta = -.71$ ,  $SE = .41$ ,  $p < .10$ ), competency ( $\beta = -1.55$ ,  $SE = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = -7.84$ ,  $SE = 2.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The fact all six estimates demonstrate a negative relationship coupled with four of the six measures reaching statistical significance provides



substantial evidence exposure to non-religious political information reduces the impact of religiosity on subsequent candidate evaluations. Across four of six dependent measures, perceptions of Chambliss are significantly reduced among participants exposed to Chambliss' issue positions prior to viewing his religiously infused campaign ad. Results suggest individuals become less reliant on religious beliefs as an evaluative standard of candidates in relatively complex information environments presenting individuals more diverse political information.

Table 5.1 – Information effects on religious priming among self-identified Christian students

<b>Variable Information Effects on Religious Priming among Student Participants</b>						
	<b><u>Trait Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Competency</u></b>	<b><u>Affect</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Religious Cue	-.46* (.21)	-.80** (.24)	-.96** (.26)	-.40^ (.23)	-.56* (.25)	-5.48** (1.79)
Traditionalism	-.18 (.21)	-.20 (.25)	-.36 (.27)	.001 (.24)	.12 (.26)	-1.55 (1.79)
Information	-.51* (.20)	-.33 (.24)	-.90** (.26)	-.12 (.23)	-.16 (.25)	-3.86* (1.74)
Cue x Traditionalism	.49^ (.26)	.96** (.30)	1.13** (.32)	.50^ (.28)	.74* (.31)	6.18** (2.19)
Cue x Information	.61* (.28)	.65 (.33)	1.34** (.36)	.36 (.31)	.44 (.34)	7.52** (2.43)
Traditionalism x Information	.52* (.25)	.34 (.29)	1.06** (.32)	.09 (.28)	.10 (.31)	4.16* (2.12)
Cue x Info x Traditionalism	-.58^ (.35)	-.71^ (.41)	-1.55** (.44)	-.36 (.39)	-.43 (.43)	-7.84** (2.98)
Constant	.91** (.17)	.93** (.20)	1.01** (.22)	.78** (.19)	.55** (.21)	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-5.00
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-2.93
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	-.88
N	141	141	141	141	141	141
R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.18	.23	.10	.24	-

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. ^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

To demonstrate the moderating effect exposure to additional information has on evaluations of Chambliss, Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below illustrate the effect of information exposure on participant's perceptions of Chambliss' competency. Specifically, Figure 5.1 presents mean competency evaluations of Chambliss across levels of traditionalism (10<sup>th</sup> to 90<sup>th</sup> percentile) in the no-information conditions, while Figure 5.2 presents the same data for participants in the prior information conditions. As represented in Figure 5.1 by the solid cues line, the effect of traditionalism is pronounced upon exposure to the ad incorporating subtle religious cues. Mean competency evaluations of Chambliss rise from .50 among progressives to .77 for traditionalists. Interestingly, although not significant, a modest decline in competency of Chambliss across levels of traditionalism emerges in the no-cue condition as illustrated by the dashed line. Evaluations of Chambliss' competency fall from .80 among progressives to .68 for traditionalists exposed to the Values ad absent religious cues. As noted in the previous chapter, however, favorable evaluations for Chambliss among religious progressives in the no-cue condition are largely a function of politically conservative, yet religiously progressive participants in the no-cue condition – a situation reflecting the conservative nature of the student population from which participants were obtained.

The pronounced religious priming effects depicted in Figure 5.1, however, are reduced among participants exposed to Chambliss' web site prior to viewing the religious ad as illustrated in Figure 5.2. Mean evaluations of competency vary far less across levels of traditionalism for subjects first exposed to Chambliss' web site as evidenced by the flatter cues line in Figure 5.2 when compared to the steeper cues line presented in Figure 5.1. Whereas in the no-information condition competency varied from .50 to .77 across levels of traditionalism among those exposed to the religious ad, competency only varies from .65 to .75 across levels of traditionalism for

viewers of the religious ad when first exposed to the Chambliss web site. In essence, the effect of traditionalism as a criterion for evaluating Chambliss is attenuated for those first exposed to diverse secular campaign information.

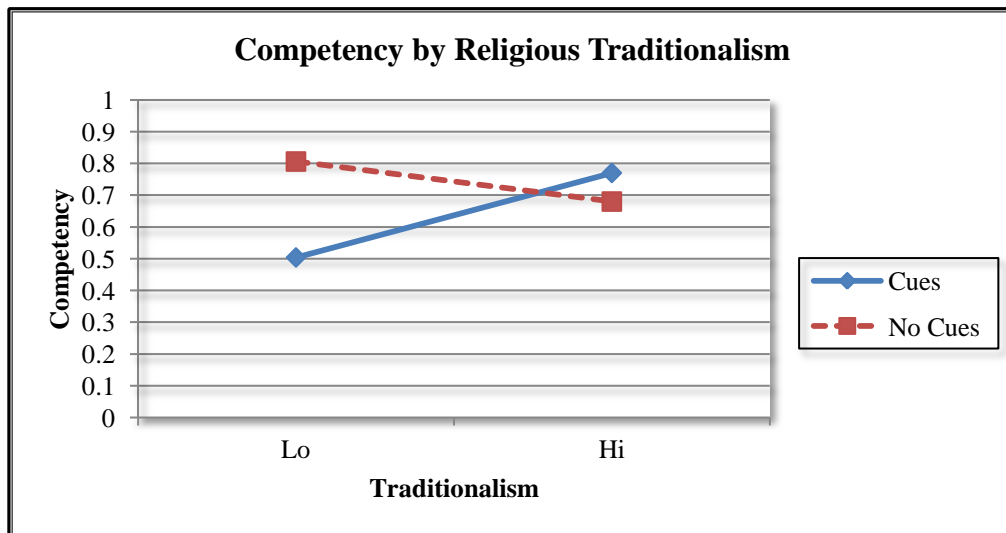


Figure 5.1 – Competency by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students in the no-information conditions

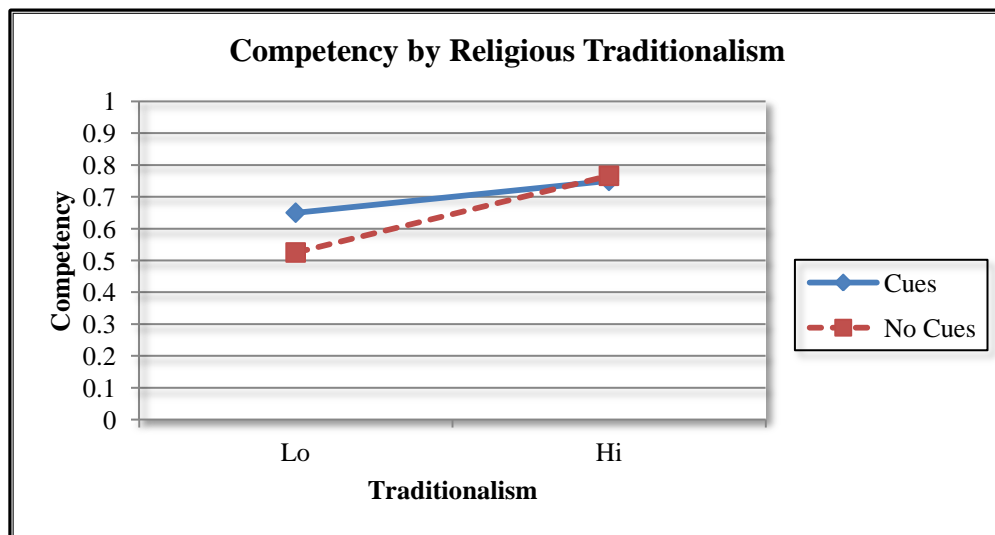


Figure 5.2 – Competency by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students in the prior-information conditions

Moreover, when comparing Figures 5.1 and 5.2, it is evident that the reduction in priming effects is driven by changes at lower levels of traditionalism. Exposure to prior information does not result in a substantive reduction in competency evaluations of Chambliss among

traditionalists primed with the religious ad; rather, progressives become modestly more favorable toward Chambliss when first presented his issue positions prior to viewing the ad with religious cues. While evaluations of Chambliss remain stable when comparing traditionalists exposed to the cues in the no-information condition (.77) and information condition (.75), evaluations for Chambliss among progressives exposed to the religious cues across information environments actually rise from .50 (no-information) to .65 (information). At the same time, competency evaluations among progressives exposed to the candidate web site in the no-cue condition are much lower (.53) than progressives in the no-cue condition not viewing the web site (.80).

Measures of competency thus illustrate relative stability of perceptions for Chambliss among more traditional participants regardless of condition or information environment and marked variability among relative progressives across conditions. The stability displayed of religious traditionalists' views of Chambliss across conditions speaks to stronger correlation between ideological conservatives and religious traditionalists such that the ad regardless of the presence of cues resonates with traditionalists. As Chambliss espouses a litany of politically conservative issue positions throughout the ad, the ad likely resonates among traditionalists based on their politically conservative predispositions as well. From this perspective, and as noted in the previous chapter, the incorporation of religious cues is not particularly effective in that the cues do not result in consistently improved evaluations for Chambliss among religiously traditional students beyond what the ad produces absent the religious cues.

In contrast to traditionalists, the consequential nature of the religious cues and the information manipulation are much more evident for progressives as evidenced by variability in evaluations of Chambliss across conditions. Exposure to the ad with religious cues results in significantly lower perceptions of Chambliss relative to traditionalists as expected. The presence

of additional secular information, however, serves to reduce the importance of religious beliefs among progressives as evaluations also hinge on the additional candidate information resulting in modestly more favorable perceptions of Chambliss. Exposure to the web site likewise provides progressive participants in the no-cue condition more diverse information with which to evaluate Chambliss resulting in less favorable perceptions of Chambliss. Evaluations among progressives thus reflect changes in one's information environment, with additional information reducing the impact of religious considerations on perceptions held of Chambliss.

In an effort to further explicate how one's information environment influences religious priming effects, Table 5.2 below provides the conditional effect of traditionalism for all continuous dependent measures across information conditions. Cell entries provide the effect of traditionalism between the cue and no-cue conditions for student participants exposed to the web site (*Info*) and those not exposed to the information manipulation (*No Info*). As discussed in the previous chapter, negative effects emerge at low levels of traditionalism in the no-information conditions across all continuous dependent variables. In essence, priming effects in the no-information condition are driven primarily by a negative effect among progressives exposed to religious cues as opposed to a robust positive effect for relative traditionalists exposed to the religious cues. The notable exception again is candidate proximity, which yields significant, positive effects at the 75<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles of traditionalism.

In contrast to the negative effects at lower levels of traditionalism in the no-information condition, exposure to additional secular information of Chambliss results in positive effects at lower levels of traditionalism, thus implying exposure to additional candidate information to moderate religious priming effects observed in the no-information condition. Consider the effect of traditionalism on trait evaluations at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile. While a significant negative effect

emerges in the no-information condition, ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ), a significant positive effect emerges among participants first exposed to Chambliss' web site, ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In fact, with the exception of small negative effects on competency at high levels of traditionalism, positive effects of the information manipulation emerge for all levels of traditionalism across all variables. Indeed, across virtually all measures, exposure to additional candidate information reduces religious priming effects, and these moderating effects primarily result from the attenuation of relatively pronounced negative effects at lower levels of traditionalism.

Table 5.2 – Conditional effect of traditionalism on candidate evaluations by information environment for self-identified Christian students

<b>Conditional Effect of Traditionalism by Information Environment</b>										
<b>Tradition Level</b>	<b>Trait Evaluations</b>		<b>General Evaluations</b>		<b>Competency</b>		<b>Affect</b>		<b>Candidate Proximity</b>	
	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>-.17</b> (.06)	.11 (.06)	<b>-.23</b> (.07)	.006 (.07)	<b>-.30</b> (.08)	.13 (.08)	-.11 (.07)	.04 (.07)	-.12 (.08)	.06 (.07)
<b>25<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>-.10</b> (.04)	<b>.09</b> (.04)	<b>-.10</b> (.05)	.04 (.05)	<b>-.15</b> (.05)	.07 (.05)	-.04 (.04)	.06 (.04)	-.02 (.05)	<b>.10</b> (.05)
<b>50<sup>th</sup></b>	-.05 (.04)	<b>.09</b> (.04)	-.001 (.04)	.07 (.04)	-.03 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.01 (.04)	.08 (.04)	.05 (.04)	<b>.13</b> (.05)
<b>75<sup>th</sup></b>	-.01 (.04)	.08 (.04)	.07 (.05)	.08 (.05)	.05 (.06)	-.005 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.09 (.05)	<b>.10</b> (.05)	<b>.16</b> (.05)
<b>90<sup>th</sup></b>	.003 (.05)	.08 (.05)	.09 (.06)	.09 (.06)	.09 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	.07 (.05)	.09 (.05)	<b>.13</b> (.06)	<b>.17</b> (.06)

Note: Cell entries provide the effect of traditionalism between cue and no-cue conditions at different levels of traditionalism for participants in each information environment. Standard errors are provided in parentheses. Bold entries indicate statistically significant effects at  $p < .05$ .

To examine the effect of added information on the ordinal vote preference variable, Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below present the predicted probability of being in the most extreme category “very likely” to vote for Chambliss across levels of traditionalism for both information conditions. Figure 5.3 presents the predicted probabilities for the no-information condition, while Figure 5.4 illustrates probabilities among participants exposed to the prior information manipulation. In the no-information condition, exposure to the religious cues results in marked

priming effects as indicated by the solid cues line. The probability of subjects responding they would be “very likely” to vote for Chambliss climbs from essentially 0 among extreme progressives to 51% among deeply traditional respondents. At the same time, however, and as discussed in the previous chapter, there is a notable decline in evaluations for Chambliss across traditionalism for participants in the no-information condition exposed to the ad without religious cues. Owing to a larger presence of religiously progressive political conservatives in the no-cue conditions, the probability of voting for Chambliss is actually higher among progressives relative to traditionalists; the probability of being very likely to vote for Chambliss declines from 71% at low levels of traditionalism to 34% for very orthodox participants.

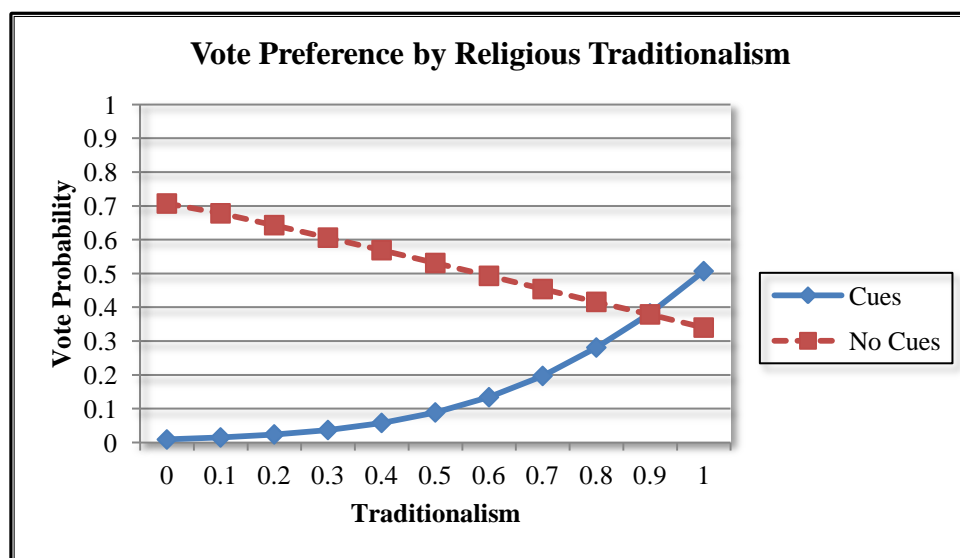


Figure 5.3 – Vote preference by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students in the no-information conditions

Exposure to prior information in the form of Chambliss’ web site, however, significantly influences priming effects initially observed among participants in the no-information condition. The solid (cues) line in Figure 5.4, for example, illustrates that the effect of religiosity is dramatically reduced across traditionalism for those exposed to the “Values” appeal with religious cues. Once again, the moderating effect of prior information exposure in the cue

condition is more pronounced at lower levels of traditionalism. While the probability of likelihood in voting for Chambliss at high levels of traditionalism remains stable across information conditions – 51% in the no-information condition and 50% in the information condition – the likelihood in voting for Chambliss at very low levels of traditionalism dramatically increases from effectively 0% among non-information participants to 28% among those first exposed to Chambliss’ web site.

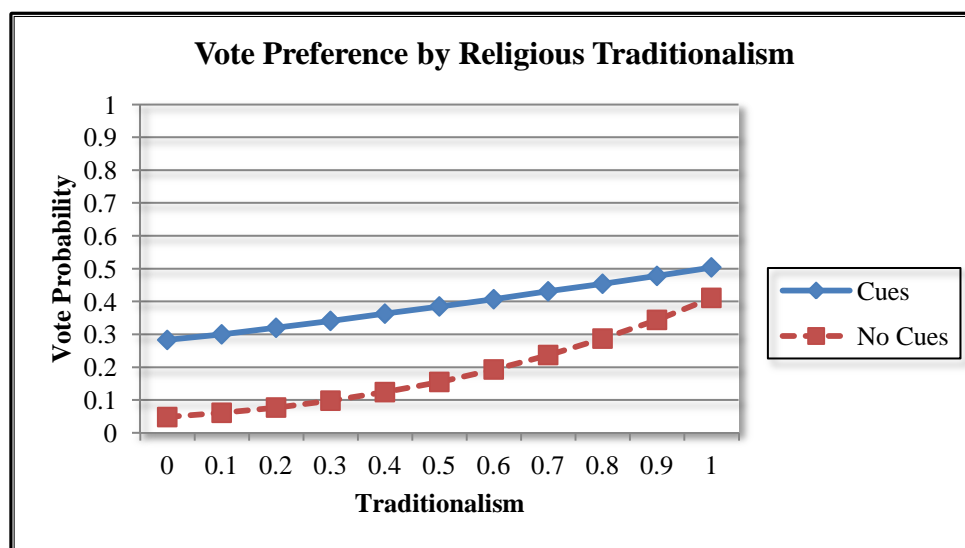


Figure 5.4 – Vote preference by traditionalism among self-identified Christian students in the prior information conditions

At the same time progressive participants exposed to both the Chambliss web site and religious cues become more likely to vote for Chambliss, respondents viewing the web site but presented the ad without religious cues become much less likely to vote for Chambliss. The probability of extreme progressives being very likely to vote for Chambliss falls from 70% in the no-information condition to 5% at identical traditionalism levels among participants exposed to the prior information manipulation. The magnitude of that decline, however, is in large part a function of the unusually high probabilities of voting for Chambliss initially observed among progressives in the no-information condition.



Aside from the artifact of favorable evaluations among progressives in the no-information condition, when observed in the aggregate, student study results provide persuasive evidence that exposure to non-religious information about a candidate significantly attenuates priming effects resulting from exposure to religious appeals. Across six distinct evaluations of Chambliss, the presence of added information is associated with a reduction in priming effects. Moreover, the reduction in priming is statistically significant for four of six dependent measures. The moderating effect of additional secular information suggests religious beliefs activated by exposure to religious cues become less applicable as an evaluative standard for participants in relatively complex information environments. Faced with diverse political information of a candidate, individuals become less reliant on their religious beliefs in formulating their political opinions. Moreover, for students, the moderating effects of secular political information are more evident at lower levels of traditionalism in offsetting pronounced negative priming effects in the no-information condition. In this vein, among those viewing the religious cues, additional political information tends to improve progressives' evaluations of Chambliss rather than lowering evaluations of Chambliss among the religiously traditional.

### **Variable Information Effects on Religious Priming among a National Sample**

Having demonstrated that exposure to secular political information attenuates religious priming effects among a sample of college students, I turn to the moderating effects of information among the nationally representative sample of adults in the second Saxby Chambliss study. Consistent with the process used to model effects among the student sample, I estimated a regression model for each of the four dependent measures created from the posttest questionnaire employed in the second Chambliss experiment – trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote preference. Each dependent variable was regressed on

traditionalism, a dummy variable corresponding to the religious cue manipulation (coded 1 for exposure and 0 for non-exposure) and a dummy variable corresponding to participant exposure (1) or non exposure (0) to the information manipulation. Likewise, all subsequent two and three way interactions were modeled (Cohen et al., 2003). Results from these models are presented in Table 5.3 below. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors for each outcome measure.

Consistent with the effects observed for student participants and as detailed in the previous chapter, exposure to the campaign appeal with religious cues produces similar priming effects among adult participants as evidenced by significant two-way, cue x traditionalism estimates. For measures of general evaluations ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = .53$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $p < .01$ ), a significant, positive effect emerges among adult participants exposed to the advertisement with religious cues, thus suggesting cue exposure to activate individual religious beliefs resulting in significantly more favorable evaluations of Chambliss among traditionalists. Likewise, the priming effect on trait evaluations ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .11$ ) is also positive and approaches statistical significance. As originally hypothesized (H1), the two-way estimates confirm pronounced religious priming effects among adult participants exposed to religious cues absent additional political information.

Exposure to the information manipulation, however, should reduce religious priming effects according to the second hypothesis (H2). Presentation of added candidate information should promote less reliance on religious considerations and greater reliance on the additional secular policy positions provided of Chambliss' modified web site. Evidence of the information manipulation to moderate religious priming effects comes in the form of negatively signed three-way, cue x information x traditionalism estimates.

Table 5.3 - Information effects on religious priming among self-identified Christian adults

<b>Variable Information Effects on Religious Priming among U.S. Adult Participants</b>				
	<b><u>Trait Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Religious Cue	-.08 (.09)	-.32* (.13)	-.23* (.11)	-.35* (.14)
Traditionalism	.25** (.08)	.26* (.12)	.35** (.10)	.24^ (.13)
Information	-.08 (.09)	-.15 (.13)	-.12 (.10)	-.25^ (.14)
Cue x Traditionalism	.19 (.12)	.48** (.17)	.39** (.14)	.53** (.19)
Cue x Information	.28* (.13)	.62** (.19)	.37* (.16)	.67** (.21)
Traditionalism x Information	.12 (.11)	.20 (.17)	.15 (.14)	.35^ (.18)
Cue x Information x Traditionalism	-.42* (.17)	-.78** (.25)	-.47* (.21)	-.91** (.27)
Constant	.46** (.06)	.41** (.09)	.35** (.07)	.39** (.10)
N	415	418	409	420
R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.13	.22	.13

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, candidate proximity and vote choice among a nationally representative adult sample. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. ^p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

As anticipated, the three-way interaction is negatively signed across all four evaluative measures, thus indicating exposure to the secular web site to reduce religious priming effects initially activated by exposure to the campaign appeal incorporating subtle religious cues. Moreover, all four three-way estimates prove statistically significant – trait evaluations ( $\beta = -.42$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta = -.78$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta = -.47$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = -.91$ ,  $SE = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It is consistently the case that exposure to prior information effectively reduces the extent to which individuals rely on their religious beliefs in forming political opinions of Chambliss. Results lend persuasive evidence

that religion becomes a less prominent consideration among potential voters faced with an array of politically relevant religious and non-religious information. Simply put, increasingly complex information environments appear to attenuate priming effects of exposure to religious appeals.

To further illustrate these effects, Figures 5.5 and 5.6 present mean general evaluations of Chambliss across traditionalism among participants not exposed to Chambliss' web site (Figure 5.5) and those participants presented the prior information manipulation (Figure 5.6). As indicated by the steeper solid (cues) line in Figure 5.5, traditionalism plays a more pronounced role once participants are exposed to the ad with religious cues. Although one's religiosity plays a significant role among viewers of the advertisement without religious cues as evidenced by mean valuations rising from .53 to .65 across levels of traditionalism, the effect for traditionalism becomes magnified once individuals are presented the ad with religious cues – mean general evaluations rise from .43 to .77 among participants in the cue condition.

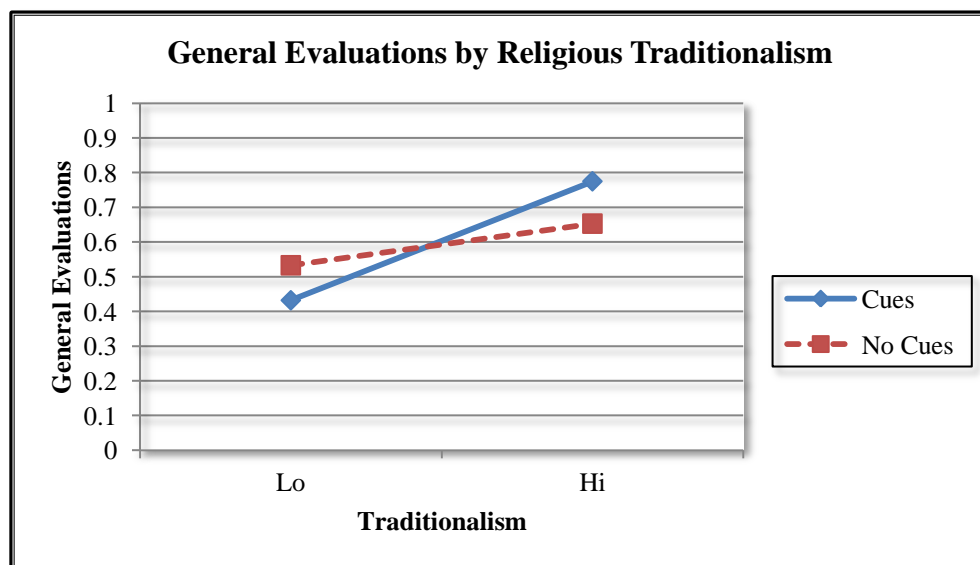


Figure 5.5 – General evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christian adults in the no-information conditions

Once individuals are exposed to the prior information manipulation presenting Chambliss' policy positions, however, the pronounced priming effect for traditionalism among

cue participants illustrated in Figure 5.5 is significantly reduced as evidenced by the much flatter cues line presented in Figure 5.6 below. Indeed, there is little effect of traditionalism among viewers of the religious appeal when they are initially presented Chambliss' web site; mean general evaluations are relatively stable across levels of traditionalism, ranging from .64 at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism to .71 at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.

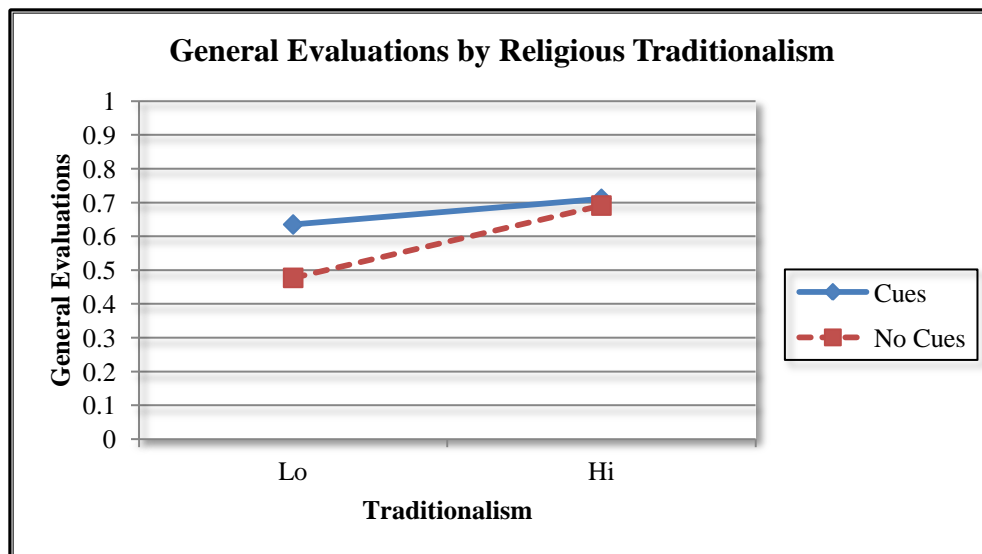


Figure 5.6 – General evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Christian adults in the prior-information conditions

As with effects observed in the initial student experiment, the moderating effect of the additional information is more pronounced at lower levels of traditionalism. Exposure to Chambliss' policy statements prior to watching the religious appeal has the disproportional effect of raising evaluations among progressives, rather than lowering evaluations among traditionalists. While mean general evaluations rise from .42 to .64 across information conditions among progressives at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile exposed to the religious cue, mean general evaluations only fall from .78 to .71 across information conditions among traditionalists at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. In essence, additional information tends to have greater effects among relative progressives in the cue condition. For viewers of the campaign advertisement without religious

cues, exposure to the information factor results in lower evaluations among progressives and higher evaluations among deeply traditional participants. Mean general evaluations drop from .53 to .48 for progressives at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism and rise from .64 to .69 among participants at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of traditionalism.

In keeping with the student analysis, I further explicate the effects of the information manipulation by deriving the conditional effect of traditionalism for each dependent variable across information environments at multiple levels of traditionalism. Cell entries in Table 5.4 below provide the effect size of traditionalism and standard errors corresponding to levels of traditionalism identified in the left-hand column. As noted with the effect on general evaluations above, moderating effects of the information manipulation are more pronounced at lower levels at traditionalism (i.e. the 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> percentiles). In essence, the presence of additional information alters the effect of religiosity on evaluations of Chambliss. Absent information, the effect of traditionalism is greater at higher levels of religiosity, which, as mentioned runs counter to the effects observed of the student sample. The presence of information, however, results in the effect of traditionalism more prominent at lower levels of religiosity.

The net effect of the information manipulation among adults, then, is to disproportionately raise evaluations of Chambliss at relatively lower levels of religiosity as opposed to dramatically reduce evaluations at higher levels of traditionalism. As illustrated of general evaluations in Figure 5.6 above, perceptions of Chambliss among progressives exposed to his web site – on average – rate him more favorably, especially among progressives that were exposed to the Chambliss ad with religious cues. The tendency for the information manipulation to offset lower evaluations among progressives is consistent for both student and adults. The primary difference between the samples, however, lies in observed effects among those in the

no-information condition. Whereas among students a more pronounced negative effect of traditionalism emerges at lower levels of religiosity, a pronounced positive effect at higher levels of traditionalism is observed for adults across all dependent measures of Chambliss.

Table 5.4 – Conditional effect of traditionalism on candidate evaluations by information environment for self-identified Christian adults

<b>Conditional Effect of Traditionalism on Candidate Evaluations by Information Environment</b>								
<b>Tradition Level</b>	<b>Trait Evaluations</b>		<b>General Evaluations</b>		<b>Candidate Proximity</b>		<b>Vote</b>	
	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>	<i>No Info</i>	<i>Info</i>
<b>10<sup>th</sup></b>	.002 (.04)	<b>.09</b> <b>(.04)</b>	-.10 (.06)	<b>.16</b> <b>(.06)</b>	-.06 (.05)	.09 (.05)	-.10 (.07)	<b>.15</b> <b>(.07)</b>
<b>25<sup>th</sup></b>	.03 (.03)	<b>.06</b> <b>(.03)</b>	-.03 (.04)	<b>.11</b> <b>(.04)</b>	.003 (.04)	<b>.08</b> <b>(.04)</b>	-.02 (.05)	<b>.09</b> <b>(.05)</b>
<b>50<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.06</b> <b>(.03)</b>	.02 (.03)	.05 (.04)	.07 (.04)	<b>.06</b> <b>(.03)</b>	<b>.07</b> <b>(.03)</b>	.06 (.04)	.03 (.04)
<b>75<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.07</b> <b>(.03)</b>	.01 (.03)	<b>.08</b> <b>(.04)</b>	.04 (.04)	<b>.09</b> <b>(.03)</b>	.06 (.04)	<b>.10</b> <b>(.05)</b>	.005 (.05)
<b>90<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>.09</b> <b>(.03)</b>	-.01 (.04)	<b>.12</b> <b>(.05)</b>	.02 (.05)	<b>.12</b> <b>(.04)</b>	.05 (.04)	<b>.14</b> <b>(.05)</b>	-.02 (.06)

Note: Cell entries provide the effect of traditionalism between cue and no-cue conditions at different levels of traditionalism for participants in each information environment. Standard errors are provided in parentheses. Bold entries indicate statistically significant effects at  $p < .05$ .

The observed differences in effects born of student and adult subjects in the no-information condition aside, the results of the information manipulation for both samples demonstrates the ability of secular, non-partisan political information to significantly moderate religious priming effects. Among student and adult subjects alike, exposure to additional non-religious candidate information reduces the impact of religiosity on subsequent candidate evaluations among experimental participants. More specifically, and as demonstrated, the moderating effect of information tends to be pronounced at lower levels of religiosity. Given this observation, the net result of the information manipulation for both student and adult participants exposed to religious cues tends to be modestly more favorable evaluations of Chambliss among progressives as opposed to a notable decline in attitudes held of more orthodox individuals.

## **The Role of Traditionalism in Complex Information Environments**

While it is clear exposure to additional secular political information reduces the impact of religious cues on candidate evaluations as demonstrated for both student and adult participants, it is less clear if individuals faced with diverse information environments completely dismiss religion as a relevant evaluative consideration or if one's religiosity continues to serve as a significant predictor of political attitudes. The results in Chapter 4 clearly illustrate the pivotal role one's religiosity, and in particular their degree of traditionalism, plays in evaluating candidates. Expanded models accounting for exposure to the information manipulation, however, demonstrate that the presence of additional secular political information renders religious considerations less consequential in formulating political perceptions of Saxby Chambliss. To explore the extent to which religiosity remains consequential for voters faced with increasingly complex information environments, I conducted simple slopes analyses examining the predictive capability of traditionalism for participants in the nationally representative adult study in the high information conditions.

Results provide persuasive evidence that religiosity remains an important evaluative consideration even in complex information environments, especially for participants not presented religious cues. Among individuals in the no-cue condition, traditionalism consistently predicts evaluations of Chambliss in spite of the additional secular information. Indeed, traditionalism significantly predicts trait evaluations ( $\beta=.37$ ,  $SE=.07$ ,  $p<.01$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta=.46$ ,  $SE=.11$ ,  $p<.01$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta=.50$ ,  $SE=.09$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta=.58$ ,  $SE=.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ) for Chambliss. For participants in the complex information condition exposed to the ad with religious cues, traditionalism also significantly predicts candidate proximity ( $\beta=.41$ ,  $SE=.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Traditionalism, however, fails to significantly predict trait



evaluations ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $SE=.12$ , ns), general evaluations ( $\beta=.16$ ,  $SE=.15$ , ns) and vote preference ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $SE=.17$ , ns) among subjects presented the information factor and religious cues.

It is worth noting, though, even the non-significant estimates are positively signed and larger than the standard errors in keeping with the general trend that traditionalism remains a positive predictor of candidate evaluations. Indeed, the results from the simple slopes analyses, in sum, suggest religiosity continues to serve as a substantive, often significant, consideration among potential voters navigating diverse information environments. The fact that religiosity plays a less consequential role among relatively informed voters, however, simultaneously illustrates priming effects to be more pronounced among those less informed. Hence, to the degree candidates seek to prime religiosity, such appeals would be more effective if presented to the relatively uninformed – for example, in relatively non competitive elections.

Beyond strategic considerations, however, the results of the information models clearly demonstrate exposure to diverse information environments to blunt religious priming effects as religious considerations become less consequential as a standard to evaluate political candidates. Although religiosity remains an important consideration regardless of information environment, the presence of secular, non-partisan political information nonetheless reduces the impact of individual religious beliefs in the formation of political attitudes.

## **Conclusion**

The present chapter sought to further explicate religious priming effects by examining how complex information environments influence the effects of religious cues on potential voters. Specifically, the chapter expanded the initial Saxby Chambliss experimental models first presented in Chapter 4 by incorporating an information manipulation. The information manipulation presented some participants Chambliss' positions on various non-religious political

issues prior to viewing a religious or non-religious version of his “Values” campaign advertisement. Manipulating the relative complexity of a subject’s information environment vis-à-vis the presence or absence of additional candidate issue positions provided the ability to simulate the potential effect of exposure to religious appeals in an actual campaign environment wherein voters are often faced with competing information flows.

Across both a student and nationally representative adult sample, results confirm that exposure to religious cues, absent prior information, activates traditionalism, which significantly influences posttest evaluations of Chambliss. Consistent with the initial priming-traditionalism hypothesis (H1), exposure to religious cues results in orthodox individuals holding much more favorable opinions of Chambliss. These priming effects, however, are attenuated among participants exposed to additional secular candidate information. Consistent with the information-environment hypothesis (H2), across students and adults alike, religious priming effects are significantly reduced in a relatively complex, non-partisan information environment presenting individuals Chambliss’ secular issue positions prior to ad exposure. Participants become less reliant on religious considerations to formulate their political evaluations to the extent they possess more diverse knowledge of Chambliss. In essence, one’s religious beliefs appear to become less applicable as an evaluative standard in an increasingly diverse political information environment.

Further conditional effects analyses conducted on the student and adult data demonstrate that the moderating effect of non-partisan, non-religious political information is more pronounced at lower levels of traditionalism. The effect of information exposure to reduce religious priming is greater among relatively progressive individuals as additional information results in progressives responding more favorably toward Chambliss. Simply put, additional

information about Chambliss tends to offset much lower evaluations of Chambliss among progressives as opposed to additional candidate information substantively reducing far more favorable evaluations of Chambliss among religiously orthodox participants. From a practical standpoint, then, once primed with religious cues, additional secular information produces a modest beneficial effect for Chambliss in that it heightens political evaluations among the religiously liberal.

In spite of findings that information environments alter the manner in which individuals draw on religious beliefs in the formation of political attitudes, additional analysis demonstrates religion to nonetheless significantly influence political evaluations regardless of exposure to extraneous partisan or non-partisan information. Results of simple slopes analyses conducted on data of adult participants exposed to additional non-partisan information about Saxby Chambliss confirm traditionalism to exert a significant effect on five of eight evaluative dimensions across cue conditions. Even in a relatively diverse information environment, religiosity remains a consequential consideration for prospective voters.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **PRIMING IN A PARTISAN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Overview**

Given the ability of non-partisan political information to attenuate religious priming effects, I now turn to the influence of partisan environments on religious priming, specifically exploring effects emerging from the presence or absence of partisan cues in religious appeals. Much like exposure to non-partisan information attenuates priming effects, the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals is expected to similarly moderate priming effects, as viewers become less reliant on religious beliefs and alternatively evaluate on the basis of their partisan predispositions. Owing to the strength of partisan predispositions to influence political behavior (e.g. Downs 1957; Kam, 2007; Mondak, 1993; Popkin, 1991; Rahn, 1993), exposure to religious appeals incorporating identifiable partisan cues should attenuate the relationship between religious considerations and evaluations, while simultaneously promoting evaluation based on partisan preferences.

To test whether exposure to partisan cues blunts religious priming effects while simultaneously promoting partisan priming, the chapter begins with a review of an experiment administered to a sample of LSU undergraduate students that relies on an actual campaign advertisement originally broadcast in a 2008 U.S. Congressional campaign. As described below, the religious advertisement is manipulated to specifically test the effects emerging from the presence or absence of partisan cues. A series of statistical models based on experimental data are then presented, with results confirming expectations, namely that the presence of partisan cues alters religious priming by promoting increased reliance on partisan predispositions in formulating political judgments.

## **Partisan Information Effects – Experimental Procedures Overview**

To examine the potential for partisan cues in religious appeals to alter religious priming effects, I rely on a three-condition (Partisan Cues: Absent, GOP, Democratic), pretest-posttest experiment administered to a sample of Louisiana State University undergraduate students drawn from the Manship School of Mass Communication experimental subject pool (N=269).<sup>31</sup> Recall, the partisan-influence hypothesis (H3) argues the relationship between evaluations and traditionalism (i.e. religious priming) will be strengthened among viewers of non-partisan religious appeals and reduced among those exposed to partisan religious appeals, while the relationship between evaluations and partisan predispositions (i.e. partisan priming) will be heightened among viewers of partisan religious appeals.

To test whether exposure to partisan cues promotes partisan evaluation at the expense of religious priming, I administered an online experiment wherein participants completed a pretest, then were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions that exposed subjects to a religious campaign advertisement presenting a candidate as either a Democrat, Republican or unaffiliated with a specific political party. Once participants finished viewing the political appeal, they completed a posttest survey gauging their opinions of the ad-sponsored candidate.

### **Pretest**

Student participants in the current partisan-influence experiment (Experiment #3) completed a pretest functionally equivalent to the pretest presented students in the original priming study (Experiment #1), with the only exception of subtle differences in question wording and response options.<sup>32</sup> Although the pretest included a battery of religious measures tapping multiple dimensions of religiosity, for parsimony, I limit discussion to measures tapping

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<sup>31</sup> The experiment was fielded from November 20-December 2, 2011 using the online survey provider Qualtrics.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for review and specific question wording. Survey Instrument #3 also serves as the instrument for experiments discussed in the following chapter.

traditionalism, which I employ in all subsequent models owing to the predictive power of one's religious beliefs relative to commitment or affiliation.<sup>33</sup>

Specifically, I sum the eight religious belief questions identified on the initial factor analysis (see Table 4.1) to create an index measure of traditionalism. In keeping with earlier analyses, I include a fundamentalist to liberal orientation question as well as a question tapping participant's views of religious tradition and practices, both measures consistent with previous religious research (Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004). Additionally, I include questions asking views on Biblical literalism as well as belief certainty in God, heaven, hell, the devil and whether Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As with earlier analyses, the eight-item traditionalism index measure proved highly reliable ( $\alpha = .92$ ). In addition to the religious questions, participants were asked to describe their political ideology and partisan affiliation on traditional 7-point scales ranging from "Very liberal" to "Very conservative" and "Strong Democrat" to "Strong Republican" respectively.

### **Stimuli**

After completing the pretest, participants were instructed they would view a brief political campaign advertisement followed by some questions asking their opinion about the candidate. All participants were presented an advertisement that aired by Gregg Harper, a 2008 Republican candidate for Mississippi's 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Congressional district. Specifically, participants viewed Harper's "Hope" advertisement. The ad was selected for its explicit religious appeals, its general lack of divisive issue-oriented content and its subtle inclusion of a textual partisan cue, which provided for relatively simple edits between conditions. The ad focuses on Harper discussing the lessons he has learned in how to treat others from his son Livingston, a special

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<sup>33</sup> The pretest also includes a battery of political interest and knowledge questions designed to tap political sophistication. As sophistication is not modeled in the current examination, but rather in subsequent models presented in the next chapter, discussion of political sophistication is included in Chapter 7.

needs child. During the ad, Harper notes that “He (Livingston) is a blessing,” and “He’s brought to life what we read in the Bible.”<sup>34</sup> The ad goes on to state Harper’s desire to take those values to Congress and carry what he “believes is a servant’s heart.”

In addition to the explicit religious cues, the advertisement opens with Gregg Harper’s name appearing on the screen and ends with a visual of Harper walking hand-in-hand with his wife while the screen presents the words “Gregg Harper Republican for Congress” coupled with Harper stating, “I’m Gregg Harper, and I approve this message.” At no point are there verbal partisan cues in the ad, only the visual “Republican” cue ending the ad. To test the effects of variable partisan environments on religious priming, three different versions of the ad were created – a non-partisan version as well as Republican and Democratic versions. In the Republican version, the ad opens with the words “Republican Gregg Harper” appearing on the screen (see Figure 6.1) and closes with the original visual identifying Harper as a

Republican. In the Democratic version, the word Democrat is substituted for the word Republican in the opening and closing of the ad (see Figure 6.2). Likewise, in the non-partisan version, the ad opens and closes with only Gregg Harper’s



Figure 6.1 – Harper “Republican” ad



Figure 6.2 – Harper “Democrat” ad



Figure 6.3 – Harper “Non-partisan” ad

<sup>34</sup> Harper’s “Hope” ad copy is provided in the appendix. Likewise, the ad is available for viewing in its original form at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaCUfEv9YTE>.

name without any specific political identification (see Figure 6.3). Other than the manipulation of the subtle change in partisan identification, the ads were identical.

Thus, depending on the condition participants were randomly assigned to, subjects were presented Gregg Harper as Democrat, Republican or simply Gregg Harper absent partisan identification. As the partisan affiliation of Harper is the only thing that changes in the ad while the religious cues are held constant, the manipulations provide the ability to examine how one's partisan attachments influence candidate evaluations relative to viewer religiosity. If H3 is correct, there should be a stronger relationship between religiosity and posttest candidate evaluations in the non-partisan condition and a stronger partisan relationship within the partisan cue conditions. In essence, the partisan cues should activate partisan predispositions thereby moderating evaluations based on religious considerations.

### **Posttest**

Upon viewing the campaign advertisement, participants were presented a posttest survey eliciting responses to evaluations of Gregg Harper.<sup>35</sup> Much like the posttest administered students in the initial priming experiment, the current posttest tapped multiple evaluative dimensions of Harper including trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, candidate proximity and vote preference. In addition, the posttest included measures designed to gauge motivation in an effort to examine the extent to which religious appeals or partisan cues motivate prospective voters. Consistent with previous analyses, all dependent measures were recoded and scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating more favorable evaluations.

Trait evaluations were measured with 10 questions asking participants how well various adjectives (e.g. wise, friendly, sincere, etc.) describe Gregg Harper with four response options ranging from "Not well at all" to "Extremely well." The measures were then summed to create

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<sup>35</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for review and specific question wording.



an internally consistent composite trait evaluation variable ( $\alpha=.90$ ). Two traditional 100-point thermometer questions asking participants to describe their feelings toward Harper and how much they liked Harper were summed to create a measure of general evaluations ( $r=.82$ ). Competency was measured with a battery of five questions asking subjects how competent Harper would be in dealing with (economic, health care, foreign policy, education and social) issues ( $\alpha=.84$ ).

As with the initial student posttest, four questions were combined to gauge affect toward Gregg Harper ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Specifically, participants were asked to what extent Harper made them feel (hopeful, angry, proud and disappointed). Two questions tapped candidate proximity, one question asking participants how much they agreed Gregg Harper shared their political views and a second question asking how much they agreed Gregg Harper shared their religious views. In addition to candidate proximity, vote preference was ascertained with a single question, “If you could, how likely would you be to vote for Gregg Harper?”. Participants selected among five possible response options ranging from “very unlikely” to “very likely.” As noted above, the posttest included two measures to gauge motivation for Harper. Specifically, one question asked subjects how motivated they would be to actively campaign for Harper, while a second question asked participants how likely they would be to put a Gregg Harper bumper sticker on their car or place a Gregg Harper sign in their yard. Responses to the two question were summed ( $r = .68$ ) to create a composite measure of campaign motivation.

### **Examining Partisan and Religious Evaluations in Variable Information Environments**

To test whether partisan cues alter the relationship between one’s religiosity and subsequent candidate evaluations, I begin by modeling the effect of traditionalism across dependent variables among non-partisan and partisan appeal viewers. Specifically, I regressed

each dependent variable on a dummy variable corresponding to the ad condition (coded “1” for inclusion in either partisan condition and “0” for exposure to the non-partisan appeal), religious traditionalism and the interaction of ad exposure and traditionalism. The results of these models are presented in Table 6.1 below with cell entries providing OLS estimates for continuous measures and ordinal regression estimates for the vote preference and proximity measures.<sup>36</sup>

Based on variable coding, traditionalism estimates represent the effect of religiosity among non-partisan appeal viewers, while the two-way, ad x traditionalism estimates represent the effect of religiosity among participants exposed to one of the partisan appeals. If H3 is correct and the presence of partisan appeals attenuates religious priming effects, we should observe positively signed traditionalism estimates across the outcome measures – thus indicating reliance on religious beliefs in evaluations – and negatively signed estimates of the interaction variable – thus indicating a reduction of religious priming upon exposure to a partisan appeal.

Table 6.1 – Religious priming by ad condition among self-identified Christian students

<b>Religious Priming by Ad Condition</b>								
	Trait Eval's	General Eval's	Competency	Affect	Campaign Motivation	Vote	Political Proximity	Religious Proximity
Ad (Partisan)	-.05 (.11)	-.10 (.15)	-.004 (.12)	-.19 (.12)	.08 (.19)	1.61 (1.34)	.41 (1.37)	1.49 (1.35)
Traditionalism	<b>.30</b> <b>(.10)</b>	<b>.42</b> <b>(.14)</b>	<b>.32</b> <b>(.12)</b>	<b>.29</b> <b>(.12)</b>	<b>.68</b> <b>(.18)</b>	<b>5.47</b> <b>(1.30)</b>	<b>3.87</b> <b>(1.31)</b>	<b>7.30</b> <b>(1.35)</b>
Ad x Traditionalism	.01 (.13)	.07 (.18)	-.04 (.15)	.18 (.15)	-.14 (.23)	-2.60 (1.64)	-1.15 (1.67)	-2.37 (1.66)
Constant	<b>.55</b> <b>(.08)</b>	<b>.41</b> <b>(.11)</b>	<b>.38</b> <b>(.10)</b>	<b>.52</b> <b>(.10)</b>	-.09 (.14)	-	-	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	1.70	.04	1.80
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	2.66	1.33	3.13
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	4.79	3.81	5.35
Threshold 4	-	-	-	-	-	6.32	5.83	7.38
N	234	234	234	234	234	234	234	234
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.11	.08	.13	.11	-	-	-

Note: Models predicting trait and general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, vote, political proximity and religious proximity among a student sample. Ad variable is dummy coded with “1” indicating exposure to either partisan condition and “0” indicating exposure to the non-partisan appeal. Bold entries significant p<.05.

<sup>36</sup> As the current experiment examines the influence of both religiosity and partisan attachments on candidate evaluations, political and religious proximity measures are analyzed individually.

As expected, exposure to the non-partisan ad results in a significant effect of religiosity on subsequent evaluations of Gregg Harper. Across every dependent measure, the traditionalism estimate is positively signed and statistically significant as indicated in bold. Consistent with previous experimental findings, exposure to the non-partisan religious appeal activates one's religious beliefs thereby influencing the perceptions individuals hold of Gregg Harper. Once again, those adhering to more orthodox religious beliefs respond much more favorably after exposure to the non-partisan religious campaign advertisement.

In contrast, the presence of partisan cues in the campaign appeal should dampen the effect of religious priming as individual evaluations hinge on partisan predispositions activated by the partisan cues. Review of the two-way, ad x traditionalism estimates, however, provides weak evidence that religious priming is reduced upon exposure to the partisan ads. Five of the eight estimates are negatively signed as anticipated, which indicates reduced reliance on religiosity – i.e. competency, motivation, vote, political and religious proximity. None of the five measures, however, achieves statistical significance. Moreover, three evaluative dimensions – trait evaluations, general evaluations and affect – demonstrate a small positive relationship upon exposure to a partisan appeal. Thus, initial analysis confirms reliance on religious beliefs among non-partisan appeal viewers in evaluating Gregg Harper, but little evidence that exposure to partisan cues dampens reliance on religiosity. Indeed, initial analysis suggests viewers of both partisan and non-partisan appeals to rely on traditionalism in forming opinions of Gregg Harper.

To further examine whether exposure to partisan cues activates one's partisan attachments thereby influencing reliance on religious beliefs in evaluating Gregg Harper, I additionally conduct an analysis of correlations across experimental conditions. Specifically, I compare the correlation between partisan identification (PID) and dependent evaluations across

ad conditions with equivalent correlations drawn between traditionalism and candidate evaluations. While the regression analysis above combines Republican and Democratic ad viewers, analysis of correlations explores the relationships between religiosity and PID with corresponding evaluations within each ad condition. Moreover, as the current experiment explores the influence of partisan attachments on religious priming across two distinct partisan conditions and one non-partisan environment, analysis of correlations provides a parsimonious presentation of the three-way interactions. The degree to which traditionalism and PID are associated with evaluations of Harper effectively represent religious and partisan priming respectively. As each type of priming likely varies across conditions, the effect of cue exposure is readily understood through review of the correlations within each experimental condition.

To that end, Table 6.2 below presents the correlation of PID and traditionalism for each evaluative dimension in the three experimental conditions. If the partisan-influence hypothesis (H3) is correct that partisan cues promote partisan evaluation over religious evaluation, we should observe a stronger relationship between traditionalism and corresponding outcome measures in the non-partisan condition. Conversely, we should observe more pronounced correlations between PID and dependent evaluations in the partisan ad conditions. Such a pattern would indicate candidate evaluation occurring based on partisan predispositions when presented an identifiable partisan cue. Absent partisan cues, however, viewers should respond to the religious cues, thus evaluation should hinge on one's religiosity in the non-partisan appeals.

Among viewers of the non-partisan appeal, the correlation between religiosity (traditionalism) and evaluations of candidate Harper is significant across all eight dependent measures. Consistent with the regression analysis above, there is clear evidence of a marked relationship between one's religious beliefs and subsequent perceptions of Harper for viewers of

the non-partisan appeal. The consistency in correlations between traditionalism and evaluations within the non-partisan ad condition suggests viewers to key on the religious cues in forming their opinions of Harper. At the same time, a consistent relationship between PID and evaluative dimensions of Harper also emerges among participants presented the non-partisan appeal. As with traditionalism, the correlation between PID and individual evaluations is significant for all measures of Harper, thus indicating viewers likewise draw on their partisan predispositions in formulating opinions of Harper even when not presented an explicit partisan cue.

Table 6.2 – Partisan and religious correlations across ad conditions among self-identified Christian students

Correlations within Ad Conditions						
	Non-Partisan		Democratic		Republican	
	<u>PID</u>	<u>Traditionalism</u>	<u>PID</u>	<u>Traditionalism</u>	<u>PID</u>	<u>Traditionalism</u>
Trait Evaluations	.28**	.35**	.27*	.26*	.21	.31**
General Evaluations	.32**	.32**	.30*	.34**	.35**	.33**
Competency	.25*	.30**	-.05	.29*	.23*	.19
Affect	.21*	.27*	.27*	.36**	.23*	.40**
Motivation	.37**	.39**	.13	.36**	.33**	.24*
Vote	.37**	.44**	.05	.23	.46**	.28*
Political Proximity	.34**	.33**	-.09	.14	.41**	.32**
Religious Proximity	.37**	.53**	.30*	.50**	.30**	.26*
<i>Average Correlation</i>	<i>.31</i>	<i>.37</i>	<i>.15</i>	<i>.31</i>	<i>.32</i>	<i>.29</i>
N	87		67		80	
Note: Cell entries provide the correlation of PID and Traditionalism with candidate evaluative measures across ad conditions. *p<.05, **p<.01.						

Consider general evaluations of Harper in the non-partisan condition. The strength of relationship between both PID and traditionalism with general evaluations is identical ( $r=.32$ ). In spite of the strength in association of PID with outcome evaluations among viewers of the non-

partisan appeal, there is some evidence that a stronger relationship exists between traditionalism and evaluations absent partisan cues. Measures of religious proximity, for example, demonstrate a stronger association with traditionalism ( $r=.53$ ) relative to PID ( $r=.37$ ). Likewise, vote preference ( $r=.44$ ) and affect ( $r=.27$ ) are more wedded to traditionalism in the non-partisan condition relative to PID ( $r=.37$ ;  $r=.21$ , respectively). In general, there is a modestly stronger relationship between religiosity and perceptions of Harper (average  $r=.37$ ) when compared to equivalent relationships between PID and evaluations (average  $r=.31$ ). Nonetheless, partisan predispositions appear to serve as a relevant consideration for individuals in formulating opinions of political candidates, even absent candidate partisan identification. As will become evident in subsequent analyses, however, the strength of PID as an evaluative standard in the non-partisan condition is likely overstated given the lack of partisan diversity across experimental conditions. All ad conditions are disproportionately populated with self-identified Republicans, who happen to display higher levels of religious traditionalism.<sup>37</sup>

Given this situation, a better indicator is to examine the relationships between PID and traditionalism with candidate evaluations in the partisan conditions. If partisanship becomes more consequential upon exposure to an explicit partisan cue, we should observe waning associations between religiosity and evaluations in the partisan ad conditions. Indeed, whereas traditionalism proved significant across all dependent measures in the non-partisan appeal, the relationship between religiosity and evaluations becomes less pronounced and more inconsistent in the partisan conditions. The relationship between traditionalism and the overtly political vote and political proximity variables, for example, fails to achieve statistical significance for viewers of the Democratic appeal. Likewise, in multiple instances, correlations between religiosity and

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<sup>37</sup> Mean Republican traditionalism in conditions (Democratic = .86; Non-partisan = .84; Republican = .83). Mean Democratic traditionalism in conditions (Democratic = .82; Non-partisan = .73; Republican = .71).

candidate evaluations of Harper decline in the Republican condition when compared to identical dependent measures of Harper among non-partisan condition participants.

As traditionalism wanes in the partisan conditions, partisan predispositions become more tightly bound to evaluations for viewers of the partisan appeals, especially those assigned to the Republican ad condition. The lack of significance emerging for PID in the Democratic ad condition once again reflects too few self-identified Democrats in the sample. Among viewers of the Republican appeal, however, partisan predispositions play a more prominent role in candidate evaluations as evidenced by heightened levels of significance for PID, especially in terms of vote preference and political proximity. As expected, when exposed to explicit partisan cues, viewers respond by increasingly evaluating on the basis of preexisting partisan attachments; absent partisan cues, evaluations hinge, to a greater degree, on one's degree of religious traditionalism. Much like the presence of secular information detailed earlier in the chapter, exposure to additional information in the form of partisan cues tends to reduce reliance on religious constructs in formulating evaluations of political figures. It should be noted, however, that religion remains an important consideration even in the face of explicit partisan cues as evidenced by significant associations between traditionalism and various evaluative measures within both partisan conditions.

### **Promoting Partisan Evaluations in Variable Information Environments**

Having examined correlations between PID and traditionalism with candidate evaluations across ad conditions, I pivot to examining informational effects within partisan conditions. To do so, I rely on an analysis of mean valuations for dependent measures by partisan identification across Democratic and Republican ad viewers. If the presence of a partisan cue activates preexisting attachments and therefore promotes partisan priming as proposed by the partisan-

influence hypothesis, we should observe notable differences in mean valuations for self-identified partisan viewers of the Democratic and Republican advertisements. Democrats should evaluate a self-identified Democratic candidate more favorably relative to a Republican candidate. Conversely, Republican participants should respond more favorably toward a Republican candidate. Table 6.3 below presents the results of the partisan analysis. Cell entries provide mean valuations with corresponding standard deviations for each dependent variable.

Table 6.3 – Mean valuations by PID across partisan ad conditions

<b>Means by PID within Democratic and Republican Appeals</b>				
	<b>Democrats</b>		<b>Republicans</b>	
	<u>Democratic Ad</u>	<u>GOP Ad</u>	<u>Democratic Ad</u>	<u>GOP Ad</u>
Trait Evaluations	.67 (.11)	.65 (.24)	.74 (.18)	.79 (.14)
General Evaluations	.57 (.19)	.54 (.23)	<b>.70</b> <b>(.22)</b>	<b>.79</b> <b>(.18)</b>
Competency	.61 (.15)	.49 (.25)	<b>.57</b> <b>(.20)</b>	<b>.66</b> <b>(.15)</b>
Affect	.63 (.16)	.59 (.15)	.73 (.20)	.76 (.17)
Motivation	.29 (.32)	.27 (.19)	.43 (.29)	.50 (.23)
Vote	.38 (.26)	.34 (.23)	<b>.47</b> <b>(.30)</b>	<b>.63</b> <b>(.19)</b>
Political Proximity	.46 (.19)	.31 (.22)	<b>.40</b> <b>(.28)</b>	<b>.60</b> <b>(.18)</b>
Religious Proximity	.50 (.16)	.44 (.26)	.64 (.27)	.70 (.20)
N	6	8	47	58
Note: Cell entries provide mean values for trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, vote, political and religious proximity among Democratic and Republican self identifiers within each partisan appeal. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Bold values indicate significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between ad condition evaluative measures among self-identified Democrats and Republicans.				

Similar to the correlation analysis presented above, there are too few self-identified Democrats viewing the Democratic appeal to make definitive statements regarding the effect of partisan exposure among Democrats. Having stated that, it is worthwhile to note Democrats consistently rate Harper more favorably when presented as a Democrat than a Republican.



Moreover, differences among Democrats in terms of competency and political proximity are substantively large in spite of a lack of significance.

The Republican condition, however, provides a much clearer picture of the effects of partisan cues on candidate evaluations. Consistent with Democrats rating “Democratic” Harper more favorably, Republicans hold more positive attitudes toward Gregg Harper when he is presented as a Republican. Across every dimension, self-identified Republicans rate “Republican” Gregg Harper more favorably. Moreover, a statistically significant increase in ratings emerges for measures of general evaluations, competency, vote preference and political proximity. Republicans view Harper as significantly more likable when presented as a Republican (.79 to .70, general evaluations). Similarly, Republicans are significantly more likely to vote for “Republican” Gregg Harper (.63) than “Democratic” Gregg Harper (.47).

Recall, the only thing that varies between partisan conditions is the word “Republican” or “Democrat” appearing at the beginning and end of the ad. The consistency of more favorable evaluations of congruent candidates among partisan viewers coupled with the significant effects emerging in the Republican ad condition provide compelling evidence that the mere presence of a partisan cue materially changes the manner in which individuals evaluate political candidates. The presence of a partisan cue serves to activate preexisting partisan attachments that are then drawn on in formulating opinions about prospective candidates. Consistent with the partisan-influence hypothesis as well as previous research (e.g. Popkin, 1991; Rahn, 1993), the presence of partisan cues promotes evaluation on the basis of one’s established political preferences.

### **The Role of Religious and Partisan Considerations in Political Evaluations**

In addition to confirming that exposure to political cues promotes partisan priming, the results of the means analysis shed light on the relationship between partisan attachments and

religiosity. Consider, although not statistically significant, Democrats and Republicans both respond more favorably in terms of religious proximity when Gregg Harper is presented as congruent with their own partisan identification. Democrats are more likely to respond that Harper shares their religious views when presented as a Democrat, while Republicans view Harper as religiously proximate when presented as a Republican. Such effects speak to the integration of religious and political constructs in the minds of potential voters. For many individuals, religion and politics are not mutually exclusive; rather, each informs the other.

It is likewise interesting to note the rather favorable evaluations self-identified Republicans offer of Gregg Harper when presented as an explicit Democrat. Although the means analysis presented in Table 6.3 clearly demonstrates the importance of partisan congruence in informing political evaluations, the fact Republicans rate “Democratic” Gregg Harper more favorable than self-identified Democrats across multiple variables similarly suggests the importance of one’s religiosity in shaping opinions of political figures. Just as religiosity was shown to predict political evaluations in spite of additional secular information as detailed in the previous chapter, traditionalism continues to exert influence over political evaluations in partisan environments as well.

To illustrate the influence religiosity exerts in shaping political evaluations, I plot evaluations of Gregg Harper across levels of traditionalism among self-identified Republicans exposed to the Democratic ad condition. Specifically, I present the effect of traditionalism on trait evaluations, a rather benign personality based dimension, and motivation, an explicitly political evaluation. Theoretically, Republicans, to the extent they evaluate based on partisan attachments to the explicit cue, should evaluate a Democratic candidate less favorably than equivalent Democrats. If, however, evaluation hinges on the religious cues in the political ad,

we should observe a positive effect on trait evaluations among Republicans across traditionalism irrespective of the partisan cue. Figure 6.4 below presents the effect of traditionalism on trait evaluations, while Figure 6.5 depicts the effect of traditionalism on campaign motivation.

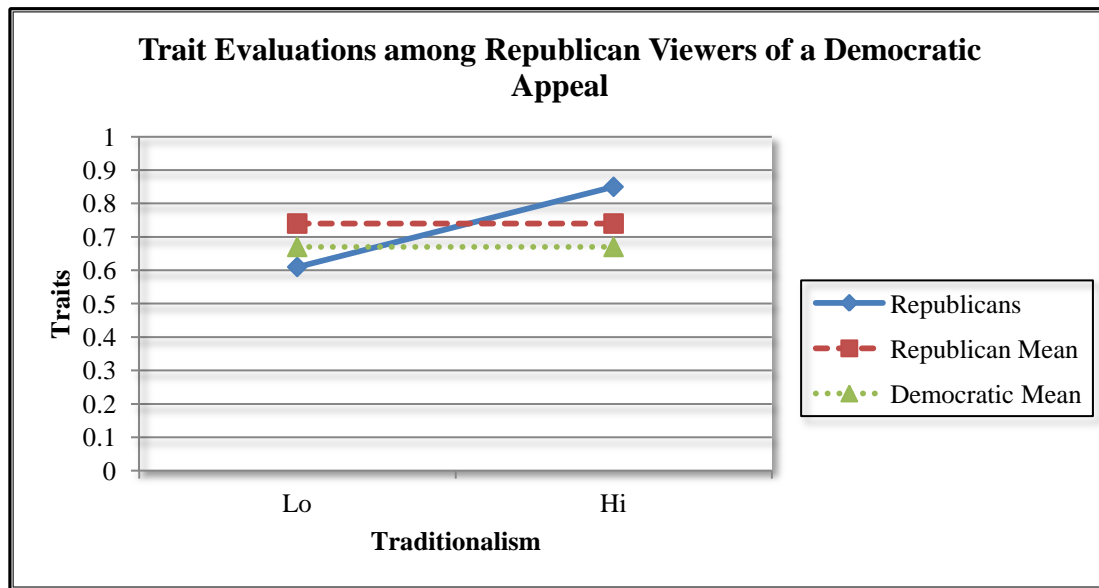


Figure 6.4 - Trait evaluations by traditionalism among self-identified Republicans

The effect of traditionalism on Republicans is illustrated by the solid line. The dashed lines provide the Republican and Democratic means for reference. As evident by the slope of the solid line, Republicans at low levels of traditionalism rate Harper less favorably (.61) than the mean level of Democratic viewers (.67). At high levels of traditionalism, however, Republicans rate Harper much more favorably in terms of trait evaluations (.85). Moreover, this effect is statistically significant ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The effect of traditionalism on trait evaluations among Republicans suggests religiosity continues to exert a powerful influence on the formation of political attitudes in spite of the presence of a potent, incongruent partisan cue. From this perspective, appeals to religiosity offer the ability for candidates to favorably influence oppositional voters.

This point is reflected in Figure 6.5, which looks at the effect of traditionalism of campaign motivation. Recall, the motivation variable is composed of questions asking participants how amenable they would be to actively campaign for the candidate as well as place signage on their car or in their yard. Not surprisingly, self-identified Republican progressives are unenthusiastic about campaigning for “Democratic” Gregg Harper (.18). Religiously traditional Republicans, however, become far more motivated upon exposure to the Harper ad (.63). Indeed, the effect of traditionalism on campaign motivation for Republican viewers of the Democratic Harper appeal is statistically significant ( $\beta=1.06$ ,  $SE=.41$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Regardless of the incongruent partisan cue, religiously traditional Republicans become much more favorable toward Harper – to the point of potentially actively campaigning on his behalf.

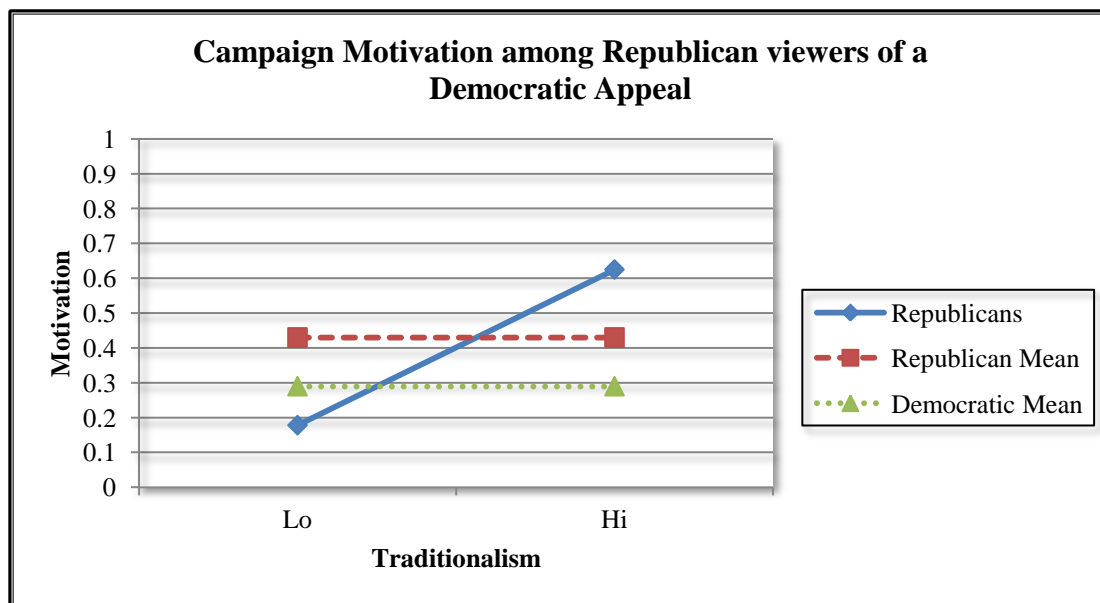


Figure 6.5 – Campaign motivation by traditionalism among self-identified Republicans

As the effects illustrated in Figures 6.4 and 6.5 demonstrate, religiosity continues to serve as an influential consideration in evaluating political figures. The religious cues in the Harper ad resonate with individuals based on their level of traditionalism, which subsequently alters perceptions of the prospective candidate. When exposed to the Democratic appeal, progressive

Republicans respond less favorably, while religiously orthodox Republicans perceive Harper in much more positive terms, and this in spite of explicit partisan cues that have been shown to powerfully influence political behavior (e.g. Kam, 2007; Rahn, 1993).

It is consistently the case that informational environments alter the manner in which religious cues resonate with prospective voters. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, exposure to additional non-partisan, secular political information reduces religious priming effects. Likewise, the presence of partisan cues in religious appeals attenuates the association between traditionalism and political perceptions as individual evaluations become shaped by long-standing partisan attachments. However, even when faced with relatively complex information environments presenting additional political information, be it partisan or non-partisan, voters continue to rely on religiosity in generating opinions of political candidates. In spite of a clear reduction in religious priming effects when exposed to increasingly complex environments, religious cues nonetheless resonate with voters based on their level of traditionalism.

## **Conclusion**

Just as exposure to non-religious, non-partisan political information alters religious priming effects, so too does the presence of partisan cues in religious campaign appeals. While the previous chapter focused on the effect of non-partisan information environments on religious priming, the present chapter examined variability in partisan cue exposure on religious priming. Consistent with hypothesized expectations (H3), experimental results confirm the relationship between religiosity and candidate evaluations to be stronger among viewers of a religious appeal absent an identifiable partisan cue. At the same time, the introduction of a partisan cue in a religious appeal reduces the association between religiosity and subsequent evaluations and heightens the impact of partisan predispositions on political evaluations. The pattern of results

thus suggests exposure to partisan cues to attenuate the effect of religious cues on the perceptions individuals form of prospective candidates. In essence, partisan cues activate one's partisan attachments, which then influence the extent to which individuals draw on religious considerations in formulating political attitudes. Such results dovetail with research that has consistently shown partisan identification to exert powerful influences on a voter's political calculus (e.g. Goren et al., 2009; Kam, 2007; Popkin, 1991; Rahn, 1993).

In spite of findings that exposure to partisan cues alters the manner in which individuals draw of religious beliefs in the formation of political attitudes, additional analysis continues to reaffirm the influence of one's religious beliefs on political evaluations regardless of exposure to extraneous partisan information. As illustrated, one's religiosity powerfully shapes evaluations self-identified Republicans express of an explicitly identified Democratic candidate. Indeed, across multiple measures, Republicans demonstrated higher mean evaluations of an openly religious Democratic candidate when compared to equivalent Democratic evaluations – a tendency driven by higher levels of traditionalism among self-identified Republicans. Traditionalism significantly influenced evaluations among Republicans of a Democratic candidate, with Republican progressives holding extremely unfavorable views and deeply orthodox adherents expressing remarkably positive perceptions of the self-identified Democratic candidate – even expressing marked motivation to actively campaign for him. Such findings speak to the persuasive power of religious appeals and the potential benefit of candidates considering the use of religious appeals to court oppositional segments of the electorate.

Taken together, the results of Chapter 5 and the present chapter demonstrate the influential effect information environments have on religious priming effects. While exposure to religious appeals examined in isolation yield pronounced priming effects based on the extent to

which one adheres to traditional religious beliefs, these effects become muted in increasingly complex information environments, be they partisan or non-partisan in nature. Nevertheless, experimental results strongly suggest one's religiosity continues to exert significant influences on political evaluations even in the face of complex information environments. Indeed, religiosity remains a consequential consideration in a voter's calculus of prospective candidates regardless of information environment.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **IMPLICIT, EXPLICIT AND BACKLASH EFFECTS**

#### **Chapter Overview**

If individual religiosity is indeed consequential to the formation of political attitudes and exposure to religious appeals has the ability to powerfully influence evaluations of prospective candidates as evidenced in the previous three chapters, does the manner in which appeals draw on religion matter? That is, must a campaign advertisement overtly reference religion to be effective or can traditionalism be activated through more subtle methods? At the same time, is it possible for candidates to experience backlash effects for mounting explicit religious campaigns? In an effort to answer these questions, I transition to the examination of possible differences in the effectiveness of religious appeals as a function of the degree to which advertisements draw on religion. In so doing, I draw heavily from racial priming literature on theories of implicit and explicit racial appeals (Mendelberg, 1997, 2001) to develop a framework for analyzing differential effects of religious appeals as well as the potential for candidates to suffer backlash effects for employing religious appeals.

The chapter begins with a review of experimental procedures designed to test differential effects of religious appeals, specifically the effectiveness of subtle, implicit appeals to activate traditionalism versus overt, explicit ads. Statistical analyses yield mixed results. Consistent with hypothesized expectations, implicit religious appeals produce priming effects similar to the effects observed of more religiously explicit campaign spots. Further analysis, however, suggests priming effects to be moderated by political sophistication. While explicit appeals appear to resonate for relative novices, implicit appeals effectively speak to sophisticates.

Following exploration of differential effects arising from implicit vs. explicit religious appeals, the second half of the chapter focuses on the potential for candidates mounting religious



campaigns to be “called out” for their use of religion and thus suffer declining favorability ratings. Once again, experimental procedures undertaken to explicate possible backlash effects are detailed, followed by a discussion of results based on a series of statistical analyses conducted on experimental data. As anticipated, model results suggest little adverse effects of candidates embracing explicit religious messaging. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of study implications for political discourse and campaign strategy.

### **Testing Implicit and Explicit Religious Effects – Experimental Procedures**

To examine possible differences in the effectiveness of implicit and explicit appeals to activate potential voter’s religious beliefs, I rely on a simple two-condition (Religious Appeal: Implicit, Explicit), pretest-posttest experiment administered to a sample of undergraduate LSU students drawn from the Manship School of Mass Communication Experimental Subject Pool (N=199).<sup>38</sup> Specifically, all participants were presented the identical socio-political pretest administered to subjects in Experiment #3. Participants were then randomly assigned to an experimental condition and instructed they would be viewing a brief political advertisement followed by a questionnaire asking their opinions about the advertisement. Subjects assigned to the implicit condition viewed a political advertisement promoting the “pro-life” position and appealing to “traditional family values,” while participants in the explicit condition viewed the same ad with the addition of explicit religious references as described below.

Recall, the implicit-explicit appeals hypothesis proposes implicit and explicit appeals to be equally effective in promoting religious priming. The design of the experiment thus permits testing whether an implicit appeal that does not specifically reference religion but contains issue positions that have become systematically wedded to religion in modern American politics (i.e. abortion and gay marriage) can nonetheless effectively activate religious beliefs akin to explicit

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<sup>38</sup> The experiment was fielded from November 20-December 2, 2011, using the online survey provider Qualtrics.

religious appeals. If this is the case, candidates would have the ability to “speak” to religious voters without formally mentioning religion.

### **Pretest**

Student participants in the current experiment completed an identical pretest to that used in Experiment #3 and as detailed in the previous chapter.<sup>39</sup> The pretest began with a battery of political interest and knowledge questions tapping political sophistication consistent with approaches used in previous research (e.g. Zaller, 1992). Specifically, two questions tapping interest and attention in politics were combined with five political knowledge questions to form a political sophistication index measure ( $\alpha=.64$ ), which was rescaled from 0 (novice) to 1 (sophisticate). As with earlier analyses, I computed the same eight-item index measure of traditionalism to operationalize religiosity ( $\alpha=.94$ ).

### **Stimuli**

After reading the consent form and completing the pretest survey, participants were instructed they would be viewing a brief political advertisement and completing a follow-up questionnaire. Subjects were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions presenting them either an implicit or explicit religious campaign appeal. Following an extensive review of candidate ads in the last two election cycles, an advertisement aired by Kenny Hulshof, a 2008 Missouri gubernatorial candidate, was selected for its characteristics as an implicit appeal consistent with criteria cited in racial priming literature (Mendelberg, 2001). In differentiating explicit and implicit racial appeals, Mendelberg (2001) argues explicit appeals employ overt racial nouns or adjectives (e.g. “blacks,” “race”) to “express anti-black sentiment, to represent racial stereotypes, or to portray a threat from African Americans,” while implicit racial appeals convey the same message through “oblique references to race” in the context of nonracial issues

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for complete questionnaires and precise question wording.

(p. 8). Although implicit racial appeals may employ words or symbols, they are most often achieved through visual imagery as exemplified by the “Willie Horton” ad (Mendelberg, 2001). By linking a visual image of a black man with violent crime, the Horton ad submerged anti-black sentiment in a nonracial context while simultaneously playing off stereotypic portrayals of “violent” African American men (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000).

In the same way racial attitudes may be activated through subtle appeals to issues that have become racialized (e.g. crime, welfare), religious considerations are likely to be activated through subtle appeals to non-religious issues that have become wedded to religion (i.e. abortion, same-sex marriage). Although non-religious in nature, scholars and pundits have long noted the bond forged between the Christian Right and divisive social issues such as abortion and traditional marriage over the past three decades such that socially conservative positions on these issues have become effectively systematized with religion (Dionne, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Thomas & Dobson, 1999). Indeed, Putnam and Campbell (2010) note abortion and traditional marriage are the two most salient issues dividing religious conservatives and liberals in modern American politics. To the extent a candidate can tap these issues, he or she need not explicitly appeal to religion to nonetheless “speak” to religious voters.

Congressman Kenny Hulshof’s “Values” ad represents just such an implicit appeal. Aired in the 2008 Missouri gubernatorial race, Hulshof’s ad extols the virtue of certain values such as hard work and “doing what’s right.” Consistent with Mendelberg’s (2001) criteria, the ad contains no explicit religious nouns or adjectives and is an ostensibly religion-free advertisement. Yet, the ad draws on the powerful “pro-life” position through on-screen text while verbally promoting “the value of life and the traditional family.”<sup>40</sup> The pro-life and

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<sup>40</sup> Ad copy with highlighted appeals is provided in the appendix. Hulshof’s “Values” ad is available for viewing in its original form at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJ4Rc0aHStg>.

traditional family appeals are set against compelling visual imagery of Hulshof playing with his wife and two young daughters, thereby reinforcing the value of life and the conception of traditional family (see Figure 7.1). The pro-life and traditional family appeals are immediately followed by a verbal appeal extolling the “value of moral clarity.” Although the moral clarity appeal speaks to Hulshof’s condemnation of fellow Republican and former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, the moral clarity reference nonetheless serves to reinforce the pro-life and traditional family appeals in moral terms.



Figure 7.1 – Hulshof Implicit “Values” ad

The pro-life – traditional family – moral clarity trifecta speaks to positions long advocated by the Christian Right. In so doing, the ad appeals to religion, but does so by avoiding explicit references to religion. Simply put, the ad represents an implicit religious appeal by submerging religious content in ostensibly non-religious issues (i.e. abortion and traditional family values). Additionally, for the purposes of this experiment, the Hulshof “Values” ad, much like the Chambliss “Values” discussed earlier, is ideal precisely because it contains no explicit partisan cues that may serve to influence candidate evaluation.

Participants randomly assigned to the implicit condition viewed the “Values” ad in its original form with the minor addition of the ending from Hulshof’s “Blessed” ad edited on to the end of the “Values” ad. The ending simply includes a picture of Hulshof’s logo with the voice over “For Governor, the candidate is Kenny Hulshof.” The ending was added to the original version of the “Values” ad to permit subtle inclusion of a verbal religious cue as detailed below. Participants in the explicit condition viewed the same ad with the subtle inclusion of three religious cues: the first, a brief textual cue presenting the words “Christian Values” in the frame

immediately preceding Hulshof stating his belief in “The value of life and the traditional family” (see Figure 7.2); a second textual cue with the phrase “A Christian leader for Christian people” appearing next to Hulshof as he is stating he is running for governor because, “I believe Missouri’s government ought to be as good as its people” (see Figure 7.3); and a third, verbal cue including the word “Christian” in the closing wherein a female voice is heard saying “For governor, the *Christian* candidate is Kenny Hulshof.” Except for the brief on-screen words and the verbal addition of the word “Christian” in the closing, the two ads were identical. Hence, the experimental design permits the examination of whether an implicit appeal that does not explicitly mention religion is any more or less effective in activating religious considerations relative to an appeal that explicitly references Christianity.



Figure 7.2 – Hulshof Explicit “Values” ad



Figure 7.3 – Hulshof Explicit “Values” ad

## Posttest

As noted above, I administered the same survey instruments used in Experiment #3 to participants in the current experiment.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, I employed the same procedures as detailed in Chapter 6 to create additive indices for the posttest evaluative dimensions of trait evaluations ( $\alpha=.89$ ), general evaluations ( $r=.66$ ), competency ( $\alpha=.83$ ), affect ( $\alpha=.78$ ), motivation ( $r=.66$ ) and candidate proximity ( $r=.66$ ).<sup>42</sup> In addition, the categorical vote preference measure is modeled. All variables were coded to indicate more favorable evaluations of Congressman Hulshof.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for complete posttest questionnaire and question wording.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 6 – Posttest for more detail on the creation of posttest index variables.

## **Modeling Implicit and Explicit Religious Priming Effects**

To test differences in the priming potential of implicit and explicit religious appeals, I performed a series of basic regression models. Specifically, I regressed each dependent variable on a dummy variable corresponding to ad condition exposure (0 for implicit, 1 for explicit), religious traditionalism and the interaction of the ad condition and traditionalism, ad x traditionalism. Table 7.1 below presents the regression estimates for these models. Cell entries for the first six variables provide OLS estimates, while the final vote model provides ordinal regression estimates. Standard errors are provided in parentheses.

The implicit-explicit appeals hypothesis (H4) suggests implicit and explicit appeals to be equally effective in promoting religious priming. If this is the case, the two-way ad x traditionalism variable should be relatively small and insignificant across evaluative measures of Congressman Hulshof, which would indicate that neither the explicit or implicit appeal results in a significant priming effect over the alternative appeal. As the ad condition is coded 1 for exposure to the explicit appeal, positively signed ad x traditionalism estimates indicate greater effects for exposure to the explicit appeal, while negatively signed estimates suggest substantive effects of exposure to the implicit appeal.

Consistent with hypothesized expectations, no significant differences emerge in terms of priming effects between exposure to explicit and implicit appeals. None of the two-way, ad x traditionalism estimates achieves statistical significance. Moreover, exposure to the appeals produces inconsistent effects as evidenced by the appearance of both negative and positive estimates across the seven measures of the two-way interaction. Simply put, results suggest no discernible difference between the implicit and explicit appeal to promote religious priming. But is priming occurring at all? Perhaps the lack of significant findings between the two types of

appeals reflects that neither ad activates traditionalism, rather than both appeals promote priming equally.

Table 7.1 – Evaluations by type of religious appeal among self-identified Christian students

<b>Implicit and Explicit Religious Priming</b>							
	<b>Trait Evaluations</b>	<b>General Evaluations</b>	<b>Competency</b>	<b>Affect</b>	<b>Campaign Motivation</b>	<b>Candidate Proximity</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Ad (Explicit)	.04 (.14)	-.15 (.17)	.07 (.15)	-.18 (.16)	.47* (.22)	.01 (.17)	.67 (1.66)
Traditionalism	.05 (.11)	.20 (.12)	.28* (.12)	-.08 (.13)	.61** (.18)	.60** (.14)	3.77** (1.37)
Ad x Traditionalism	-.05 (.17)	.17 (.21)	-.04 (.18)	.24 (.20)	-.50 (.27)	.04 (.21)	-.43 (2.02)
Constant	.69** (.09)	.55** (.12)	.36** (.10)	.64** (.11)	-.08 (.15)	.10 (.11)	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	.26
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.46
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.50
Threshold 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.30
N	172	172	172	172	172	172	172
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.05	.06	.03	.08	.18	-

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Ad variable is dummy coded with “1” corresponding to the explicit religious appeal and “0” indicating implicit appeal. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

The significant traditionalism estimates for competency ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ), campaign motivation ( $\beta = .61$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta = .60$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta = 3.77$ ,  $SE = 1.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ), which represent the effect of religiosity in the implicit condition, however, suggests that the implicit appeal resonates with viewers’ religiosity. Likewise, the effect of traditionalism for general evaluations ( $\beta = .20$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .11$ ) approaches statistical significance. Thus, for five of seven measures, a marked religious effect emerges for viewers exposed to the implicit Hulshof appeal.

To determine if exposure to the explicit appeal similarly resonates with viewers based on religiosity, I conducted a simple slopes analysis within the explicit appeal condition. Consistent with effects of exposure to the implicit appeal, results provide persuasive evidence that viewing

the explicit appeal likewise activates religious traditionalism. Among those exposed to the explicit appeal, a significant effect of religiosity emerges for general evaluations ( $\beta=.37$ ,  $SE=.18$ ,  $p<.05$ ), competency ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $SE=.14$ ,  $p<.10$ ), affect ( $\beta=.33$ ,  $SE=.15$ ,  $p<.05$ ), candidate proximity ( $\beta=.64$ ,  $SE=.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta=3.14$ ,  $SE=1.55$ ,  $p<.05$ ) for Hulshof. In essence, exposure to either appeal appears to promote evaluations on religious terms, with more traditional viewers holding significantly more favorable views of Hulshof across a host of evaluative qualities. Moreover, it appears candidates can activate religious considerations among potential voters without formally communicating religious statements or symbols as evidenced by effects among implicit appeal viewers. Advocating a pro-life position and traditional family values seemingly primes religiosity in lieu of more explicit statements.

### **The Moderating Effect of Political Sophistication on Implicit and Explicit Priming**

The ability of implicit religious appeals to activate individual religious considerations is congruent with the research of racial priming scholars (Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Mendelberg, 2001). In her seminal work on racial appeals, Mendelberg (2001) argues candidates have increasingly turned away from explicit appeals and toward implicit racial appeals owing to the effectiveness of implicit appeals in activating latent racial attitudes. More recent research, however, has qualified Mendelberg's thesis in noting the priming effect of racial appeals to be moderated by education (Huber & Lapinski, 2006). While highly educated individuals dismiss both explicit and implicit racial appeals as a violation of egalitarian norms, the uneducated fail to distinguish appeal type and are thus primed by both types of appeals.

Owing to the significant moderating effect of education in the domain of implicit and explicit racial priming, I further analyze the current experimental data for moderators of religious priming. As the use of a homogenous college sample prevents examination of moderation by



education, I turn to political sophistication given its status as a significant moderator of priming effects noted by other scholars (e.g. Zaller, 1992). To test for the possible moderating effect of political sophistication on religious priming, I expand the regression models presented in Table 7.1 to include the measure of sophistication constructed from pretest questions. Specifically, I regress each dependent variable on a dummy variable corresponding to ad condition exposure (0 for implicit, 1 for explicit), religious traditionalism and the sophistication measure. Additionally, I model the three-way, ad x tradition x sophistication interaction and control for all lower order interactions (Cohen et al., 2003). The results of these models are presented in Table 7.2 below, with cell entries providing OLS estimates and standard errors for the first six outcome variables and ordinal estimates for the categorical vote preference measure.

Interestingly, the inclusion of sophistication in regression models results in significant ad x traditionalism estimates for trait evaluations ( $\beta = 1.46$ ,  $SE = .63$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and general evaluations ( $\beta = 1.98$ ,  $SE = .80$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while affect ( $\beta = 1.50$ ,  $SE = .76$ ,  $p < .10$ ) demonstrates modest significance. The two-way, ad x traditionalism interaction in the current model denotes the effect of traditionalism among explicit appeal viewers when political sophistication is zero. While the earlier analysis produced no significant differences between the two types of appeals in activating traditionalism, accounting for sophistication alters that relationship. Indeed, a significant priming effect emerges for political novices exposed to the explicit appeal. The positively signed estimates indicate more favorable evaluations of Hulshof among politically inattentive explicit ad viewers compared to novice implicit appeal viewers. Although the two-way interaction fails to achieve significance for four evaluations of Hulshof, and in fact demonstrates a negative relationship for campaign motivation and vote preference, there is nonetheless suggestive evidence that one's political sophistication influences religious priming.

Table 7.2 – Moderating effect of political sophistication on implicit and explicit religious priming among self-identified Christian students

<b>Effects of Political Sophistication on Implicit and Explicit Religious Priming</b>							
	<u>Trait</u> <u>Eval's</u>	<u>General</u> <u>Eval's</u>	<u>Competency</u>	<u>Affect</u>	<u>Campaign</u> <u>Motivation</u>	<u>Candidate</u> <u>Proximity</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Ad (Explicit)	-1.34* (.52)	-1.65* (.66)	-.67 (.56)	-1.20^ (.63)	.12 (.86)	-.99 (.66)	-5.15 (6.42)
Traditionalism	-.43 (.43)	-.75 (.55)	-.17 (.47)	-.31 (.52)	.04 (.71)	.14 (.54)	-1.43 (5.39)
Sophistication	-.63 (.51)	-1.10^ (.65)	-.54 (.55)	-.37 (.62)	-.56 (.84)	-.45 (.65)	5.30 (7.79)
Ad x Traditionalism	1.46* (.63)	1.98* (.80)	.78 (.69)	1.50^ (.76)	-.18 (1.04)	1.18 (.80)	-7.07 (6.31)
Ad x Sophistication	1.93** (.72)	2.14* (.92)	1.03 (.78)	1.43 (.87)	.47 (1.19)	1.38 (.91)	8.37 (8.90)
Traditionalism x Sophistication	.71 (.62)	1.44^ (.79)	.68 (.68)	.61 (.75)	.88 (1.03)	.71 (.79)	7.58 (7.68)
Ad x Tradition x Sophistication	-2.09* (.88)	-2.60* (1.12)	-1.15 (.96)	-1.77^ (1.07)	-.42 (1.46)	-1.57 (1.12)	-8.07 (10.91)
Constant	1.11** (.35)	1.29** (.45)	.72^ (.38)	.88* (.43)	.29 (.59)	.40 (.45)	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-4.59
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-3.38
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-1.32
Threshold 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	.50
N	172	172	172	172	172	172	172
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.08	.08	.07	.11	.22	-

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Ad variable is dummy coded with “1” corresponding to the explicit appeal and “0” indicating the implicit appeal. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

Indeed, of particular interest is the three-way, ad x tradition x sophistication interaction, which speaks to the moderating effects of political sophistication on religious priming. Coding of the variables dictates that negatively signed estimates indicate sophistication to attenuate religious priming effects. As is evident, all three-way estimates are negatively signed with three variables achieving at least modest statistical significance – trait evaluations ( $\beta=-2.09$ ,  $SE=.88$ ,  $p<.05$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta=-2.60$ ,  $SE=1.02$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and affect ( $\beta=-1.77$ ,  $SE=1.07$ ,  $p<.10$ ).

The consistent pattern of negative findings coupled with significance across three dependent measures suggests one's level of political sophistication to attenuate religious priming effects. Much like exposure to additional secular political information was shown to reduce religious priming effects in earlier experiments, sophistication appears to produce similar moderating effects, with greater sophistication associated with less pronounced priming effects.

Moreover, it is important to note significant three-way effects emerge in spite of the regression models suffering from marked collinearity owing to inclusion of the interaction variables.<sup>43</sup> As collinearity inflates standard errors thereby reducing the likelihood of significant findings, estimates potentially understate the moderating effects of sophistication on religious priming. Having stated that, model results nonetheless point toward one's level of political sophistication as a consequential factor influencing the extent to which religiosity is drawn on in the formation of political opinions.

### **Visualizing the Moderating Effects of Political Sophistication**

To further explicate the moderating influence individual political sophistication has on religious priming effects, Figures 7.4 and 7.5 illustrate the significant effects of sophistication on trait evaluations of Hulshof. Figure 7.4 presents the effect on trait evaluations across levels of traditionalism among political novices, while Figure 7.5 illustrates the same effect for political sophisticates.<sup>44</sup> As indicated by the solid "explicit" line in Figure 7.4, traditionalism plays a pronounced role among political novices exposed to the explicit Hulshof ad. Consistent with findings of the Saxby Chambliss experiments, exposure to the overt religious appeal activates

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<sup>43</sup> The three-way interaction for all continuous variables yield tolerance levels of .002 and VIF statistics exceeding 473. VIF values exceeding 10 are commonly recognized as cause for concern regarding multi-collinearity (e.g. Mason, Guntz & Hest, 1989; Neter, Wasserman & Kutner, 1989).

<sup>44</sup> "Novice" effects are based on effects at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of political sophistication, while "sophisticates" are effects occurring at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of sophistication. Similarly, traditionalism is noted at the 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (i.e. Lo and Hi). Both figures represent effects for self-identified Christian students.

traditionalism among novices, which subsequently influences evaluations of Hulshof. While progressive novices rate Hulshof significantly lower in terms of trait evaluations (.54), highly orthodox novices rate Hulshof much more favorably (.75). Evaluations among novice viewers of the implicit appeal, however, remain largely stable across levels of traditionalism – slightly declining from .79 for progressives to .73 for relative fundamentalists.

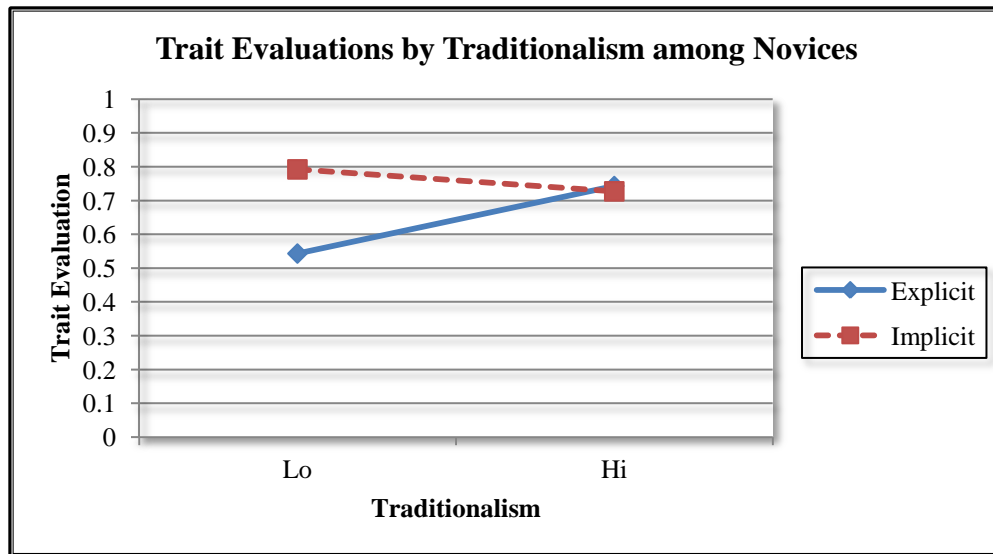


Figure 7.4 – Trait evaluations by traditionalism among political novices

The significant religious priming effects observed among political novices in Figure 7.4, however, effectively disappear for more politically sophisticated viewers as illustrated in Figure 7.5. Indeed, the effect across ad conditions is inverted. A slight but insignificant rise in evaluation of Hulshof across traditionalism emerges for politically sophisticated viewers of the implicit appeal; mean trait evaluations rise from .69 among progressives to .75 for traditionalist viewers of the implicit appeal. In contrast, a modest but insignificant decline in perceptions of Hulshof presents among sophisticated participants exposed to the explicit appeal; mean valuations fall from .81 to .76 across levels of traditionalism. In essence, for political sophisticates, priming effects are muted, thus suggesting religiosity to play a reduced role in the formation of political attitudes among the politically astute. Conversely, priming effects are

pronounced among relative novices exposed to explicit religious appeals. For the politically inattentive, explicit religious appeals activate existing religious beliefs, which are relied on heavily to guide evaluations of political candidates.

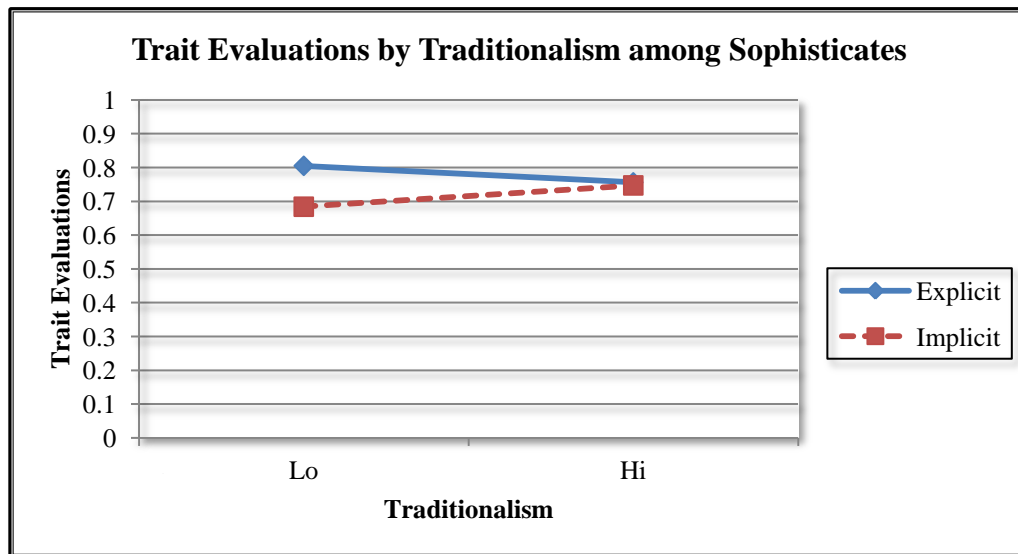


Figure 7.5 – Trait evaluations by traditionalism among political sophisticates

The finding that religious priming effects are moderated by political sophistication such that novices appear most susceptible to priming effects is consistent with previous literature (e.g. Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). Krosnick and Kinder (1990) argue priming effects to be more pronounced among novices due to less complex belief structures. While sophisticates possess a diverse collection of mental considerations that tends to mute the effect of a single piece of information, the sparse mental bins of novices make them more susceptible to priming from exposure to limited information.

Applied to current results, political novices appear to be more reliant on their religious beliefs once primed by exposure to the explicit religious appeal, while sophisticates likely formulate opinions of Hulshof based on more diverse criteria, which perhaps includes predispositions triggered by other ad aspects (e.g. lower taxes, smaller government, etc.). Such an assumption dovetails with Huber and Lapinski's (2006) contention that relative sophisticates

are more likely to rely on existing predispositions relative to novices. A caveat here is current study results appear to qualify the findings of Huber and Lapinski (2006). While Huber and Lapinski (2006) find education to significantly moderate racial priming effects, present findings that sophistication in the form of political attentiveness and knowledge moderates religious priming effects suggests education simply serves as a proxy for sophistication. As the current sample lacks educational variance, the finding that sophistication nonetheless attenuates priming effects implies education as a moderator in other domains may actually be masking another construct, assuming, of course, general equivalency in religious and racial priming processes.

### **The Role of Traditionalism and Political Sophistication**

While results suggest sophistication to influence reliance on religiosity in forming political evaluations, it remains unclear if religion is dismissed entirely as a relevant consideration or if religiosity continues to shape political attitudes. To investigate the extent to which religiosity remains consequential, I conducted simple slopes analyses examining the effect of traditionalism at minimum and maximum levels of sophistication in each ad condition. Results provide mixed evidence of reliance on religiosity as a function of both political sophistication and ad exposure. While the effect of traditionalism is consistently evident within the implicit condition at high levels of sophistication, no significant effects emerge among explicit appeal viewers. Within the implicit appeal condition, traditionalism significantly predicts general evaluations ( $\beta=.68$ ,  $SE=.26$ ,  $p<.01$ ), competency ( $\beta=.50$ ,  $SE=.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ), motivation ( $\beta=.92$ ,  $SE=.36$ ,  $p<.05$ ), proximity ( $\beta=.85$ ,  $SE=.27$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and vote preference ( $\beta=.65$ ,  $SE=.29$ ,  $p<.05$ ) for Hulshof at high levels of sophistication. Moreover, trait evaluations and affect, though not statistically significant, are positively signed and approach significance, thus indicative of the general trend that religiosity continues to exert influence on political evaluations

for relative sophisticates. Conversely, no significant effects of traditionalism emerge across dependent evaluations of Hulshof within the explicit appeal condition. Although six of the seven outcome measures are positively signed as anticipated, none reach statistical significance.

A mirror image of these effects, however, emerges from simple slopes analyses conducted at low levels of sophistication. While no significant effects of traditionalism occur at high levels of sophistication within the explicit appeal, there is marked evidence of reliance on religiosity among relative novices within the explicit condition. Indeed, traditionalism predicts trait evaluations ( $\beta=1.04$ ,  $SE=.50$ ,  $p<.05$ ), general evaluations ( $\beta=1.23$ ,  $SE=.66$ ,  $p<.10$ ), affect ( $\beta=1.19$ ,  $SE=.57$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and candidate proximity ( $\beta=1.32$ ,  $SE=.63$ ,  $p<.05$ ) for Hulshof at low levels of political sophistication among explicit appeal viewers. Conversely, and in direct contrast to effects for sophisticates, religiosity does not significantly predict any dependent evaluations of Hulshof for relative novices exposed to the implicit appeal.

Results of the simple slopes analyses, thus, paint a conflicting picture of the effect of religiosity across levels of political sophistication. While novices appear to rely heavily on religion upon exposure to the explicit appeal, sophisticates do not. Traditionalism, however, is tightly bound to evaluations among sophisticated viewers of the implicit appeal. The pattern of effects therefore suggests the explicit appeal to be more effective at tapping religiosity among relative novices, while the implicit appeal appears effective at reaching more politically astute viewers. In essence, novices appear to cue on the overt religious messages, yet fail to grasp the subtle religious associations of the implicit appeal. In contrast, a subtle approach appears to pay dividends for candidates courting politically astute traditionalists. Such effects speak to the need for campaign strategists to carefully consider the political sophistication of prospective voters when crafting campaign communications.

## **Backlash Effects – Experimental Procedures Overview**

Having demonstrated that exposure to religious appeals primes religiosity resulting in significant influences in evaluations of political candidates, I conclude formal analysis by exploring the potential for candidates to experience backlash effects for mounting religious campaigns. Study results to this point consistently suggest religiosity to be consequential in the formation of political attitudes, but the presence of additional information, both partisan and non-partisan, appears to blunt these effects. I therefore return to the effect of information on religious priming effects by once again borrowing from racial priming literature to explore whether calling attention to the use of religion in politics as an inappropriate violation of church-state norms results in declining evaluations of candidates explicitly appealing to religion. In this vein, formal analysis concludes with an examination of backlash effects emerging from an adversarial information environment.

Consider, in the domain of racial priming, Mendelberg (2001) argues calling critical attention to or “calling out” the use of implicit racial appeals serves to blunt the effect of the appeals as viewers are made aware of the racial content and dismiss the ads as a violation of racial egalitarian norms. The norm of racial equality has made explicit racial appeals largely nonexistent, thus calling out racial appeals focuses on implicit appeals. Calling attention to religious appeals, however, typically results from candidate’s explicit appeals to religion, for example critical coverage of Rick Perry’s *Response* (Cominsky, 2011) or the religiosity of multiple 2012 Republican presidential nominees (e.g. Goldberg, 2011; Lizza, 2011; Wilder, 2011). Indeed, unlike racial priming, it is the explicit use of religion that tends to precipitate critical news coverage and commentary as opposed to more implicit appeals referencing the pro-life position or traditional family values.



As such, I focus examination on adverse call-out effects as it applies to explicit religious appeals. I specifically investigate the extent to which calling out the use of explicit religious appeals effectively blunts priming effects through a two-condition (Call out: Absent, Present), between-subjects experiment administered to a sample of undergraduate LSU students drawn from the Manship School of Mass Communication Experimental Subject Pool (N = 183).<sup>45</sup> Subjects were presented a brief socio-political pretest identical to that used in Experiments #3 and #4. Following completion of the pretest, participants were assigned to one of two experimental conditions as described below and instructed they would be viewing a political campaign advertisement followed by a posttest survey eliciting their opinions of the candidate.

### **Pretest**

As noted above, student participants completed an identical pretest to that employed in Experiments #3 and #4.<sup>46</sup> Consistent with the process detailed in Chapter 6,<sup>47</sup> I created an additive index measure of political sophistication ( $\alpha=.60$ ) and religious traditionalism ( $\alpha=.94$ ) based on pretest responses. Both measures were recoded and scaled from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating greater sophistication and traditionalism respectively.

### **Stimuli**

Upon completion of the pretest, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Participants in the control condition (Call out: Absent) viewed an explicit religious campaign ad, specifically Ronnie Musgrove's "Choir Practice" ad described below, while subjects in the treatment condition (Call out: Present) viewed the identical ad followed by a second advertisement critical of religion in politics, specifically the "Democracy

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<sup>45</sup> The experiment was fielded from November 20-December 2, 2011, using the online survey provider Qualtrics.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for complete questionnaires and precise question wording.

<sup>47</sup> See discussion of pretest measures of Experiment #3 in Chapter 6 for more detail on creation of index variables.

Not Theocracy” ad aired by *First Freedom First* in 2008. The follow-up advertisement thus served to “call out” the use of religious appeals in political campaigns.

Ronnie Musgrove’s “Choir Practice” ad was selected as the religious campaign appeal presented to both conditions given its particularly overt religious nature.<sup>48</sup> The YouTube ad was created by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and released in April of 2008 on behalf of Musgrove’s U.S. Senate campaign in Mississippi. The minute-long ad follows Musgrove at choir practice at the First Baptist Church of Jackson and includes repeated statements by Musgrove extolling his views on Christ and responsibilities of Christians (see Figure 7.6). Interestingly, the ad was inexplicably taken off YouTube shortly after its release, which suggests the candidate’s campaign was



uncomfortable with the overt religious theme of the ad and feared potential voter backlash.<sup>49</sup> A situation, if true, that makes for a compelling case to examine potential backlash effects associated with the appeal. Subjects in the first condition (Call out: Absent) thus viewed the Choir Practice ad as it aired with the only modification a minor edit to remove the partisan cue identifying the ad sponsor in the last frame. The partisan cue was removed to minimize the potential influence of partisan predispositions on evaluations of Musgrove. Save for the subtle edit, the ad was presented as it originally appeared on YouTube.

Participants in the treatment condition (Call out: Present) viewed the identical Musgrove ad immediately followed by the “Democracy Not Theocracy” ad aired in the 2008 election cycle

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<sup>48</sup> Ad copy is provided in the appendix. Additionally, the “Choir Practice” ad is available for viewing in its original form at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONQDwCzTzPU&feature=related>.

<sup>49</sup> In spite of being pulled, the ad remains available and was mentioned in political coverage of the race by local news organizations such as *The Commercial Appeal* (Sullivan, 2008) and *NPR* (Elliot, 2008).

by *First Freedom First*, a partnership of *The Interfaith Alliance Foundation* and *Americans United for Separation of Church and State* (see Figure 7.7).<sup>50</sup> *First Freedom First* was specifically organized to call attention to the growing role of religion in politics, and during the 2008 election cycle, the organization released multiple advertisements critical of the mixing of religion in politics. Hence, the roughly one-minute “Democracy Not Theocracy” ad presented an ideal counter-appeal – in identical length and media format – to rebut the use of explicit religious appeals such as the Choir Practice ad.



Figure 7.7 – “Democracy Not Theocracy” ad

### Posttest

Upon viewing the ad(s), subjects completed the same posttest as used in Experiments #3 and #4 with only minor modification to questions to account for a different candidate.<sup>51</sup> Consistent with earlier procedures, I created additive indices for trait evaluations ( $\alpha = .90$ ), general evaluations ( $r = .88$ ), competency ( $\alpha = .85$ ), affect ( $\alpha = .85$ ), motivation ( $r = .70$ ) and candidate proximity ( $r = .71$ ).<sup>52</sup> In addition, the categorical vote preference measure is examined. Consistent with previous analyses, all posttest variables were rescaled from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating more positive evaluations of the candidate – in this case Ronnie Musgrove.

### Calling out the use of Religious Appeals

To test whether exposure to the critical advertisement effectively blunts religious priming effects resulting from the Choir Practice ad, I conducted a series of basic regression models wherein I regressed each dependent variable on a dummy variable corresponding to ad condition

<sup>50</sup> “Democracy not Theocracy” ad copy is provided in the appendix. The ad is also available for viewing in its original form at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZpmq0nz7pY>.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix Survey Instrument #3 for complete posttest questionnaire and question wording.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 6 – Posttest for more detail on the creation of posttest index variables.

exposure (0 for No call out, 1 for Call out), religious traditionalism and the interaction of the ad condition and traditionalism, ad x traditionalism. The results of these models are presented in Table 7.3 below. Cell entries provide OLS estimates and standard errors for the first six dependent measures and ordinal regression estimates for vote preference.

If exposure to the ad critical of religion in politics reduces religious priming effects relative to the Choir Practice ad, coding of the variables dictates we should observe negatively signed estimates of the two-way, ad x traditionalism interaction. Negatively signed estimates would indicate exposure to the Choir Practice ad followed by the Democracy Not Theocracy ad results in a reduction in the effect of religiosity to influence evaluations of Musgrove. Recall, however, hypothesized expectations suggest calling out the use of religious appeals in political campaigns will not significantly attenuate priming effects owing to social acceptability of religion in society and politics. Hence, we should observe no significant effect of exposure to the critical advertisement.

As anticipated, no significant effect emerges for any of the seven dependent measures of Musgrove among participants in the treatment condition as represented by the two-way estimates across models. Moreover, only two of seven estimates – trait evaluations and competency – are negatively signed and thus indicative of attenuation effects, and both estimates produce relatively small effects.<sup>53</sup> Given such inconsistent, modest effects, experimental results provide little evidence that “calling out” the use of religion in politics, at least as operationalized in the current study, produces notable adverse consequences for candidates mounting explicit religious appeals.

What is evident based on results in Table 7.3, however, is a profound and uniform effect of religiosity on evaluations of Musgrove among viewers in the control (no call out) condition.

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<sup>53</sup> A power analysis using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009) on the effect size for *competency* reveals approximately 7,000 subjects per condition would be required to achieve statistical significance at  $p < .05$  – a figure that would simultaneously yield significant *positive* effects of the call out for candidate proximity, for example.

The traditionalism estimates, which are uniformly significant across all evaluative dimensions of Musgrove, capture the effect of religiosity among participants only exposed to the Choir Practice ad. In effect, exposure to the explicit Choir Practice ad activates traditionalism, which subsequently influences evaluations of Musgrove. Participants embracing more orthodox religious beliefs evaluate Musgrove much more favorably upon exposure to the overt appeal.

Table 7.3 – Call-out effects on religious priming among self-identified Christian students

<b>Call-out Effects on Religious Priming</b>							
	<b><u>Trait Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>General Evaluations</u></b>	<b><u>Competency</u></b>	<b><u>Affect</u></b>	<b><u>Campaign Motivation</u></b>	<b><u>Candidate Proximity</u></b>	<b><u>Vote</u></b>
Ad (Call-out)	.19 (.14)	-.04 (.18)	.04 (.16)	.01 (.16)	-.07 (.19)	-.07 (.16)	-1.79 (1.53)
Traditionalism	.43** (.13)	.47** (.16)	.41** (.15)	.45** (.15)	.58** (.17)	.63** (.15)	2.78* (1.40)
Ad x Traditionalism	-.19 (.17)	.03 (.22)	-.06 (.19)	.01 (.20)	.04 (.23)	.08 (.20)	2.31 (1.87)
Constant	.31** (.10)	.25^ (.13)	.18 (.11)	.26* (.12)	-.10 (.14)	.04 (.12)	
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	.49
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.61
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.65
Threshold 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.06
N	165	165	165	165	165	165	165
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	.11	.09	.12	.15	.23	-

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Ad variable is dummy coded with “1” corresponding to the call out and “0” indicating no call out. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

Not surprisingly given the strength and uniformity of the effect of religiosity in the control condition, results from a simple slopes analysis conducted among viewers of the appeal followed by the critical ad (i.e. call out condition) demonstrates similarly pronounced effects for traditionalism. Indeed, traditionalism proves highly significant for every evaluative measure of Musgrove in the call out condition as well. In essence, the Choir Practice ad viewed in isolation or in conjunction with the ad critical of religion in politics activates traditionalism resulting in

significant influences on opinions of Musgrove among study participants. Calling out the use of religious appeals as a violation of church-state norms fails to blunt religious priming effects. There is no significant adverse effect of exposure to the critical call out on evaluations of Musgrove relative to the perceptions of Musgrove among viewers of only the Choir Practice ad.

Having stated that, a comparison of the ads used across experiments in terms of mean evaluations for all available dependent measures reveals exposure to the Choir Practice ad to produce lower evaluations relative to any other religious appeal analyzed.<sup>54</sup> On every dependent measure, viewers of the Choir Practice ad as a whole rate Musgrove less favorably than participants exposed to any of the other religious appeals. Both adult and student participants presented the original Chambliss “Values” ad rate Chambliss far more favorably. Similarly, viewers of the non-partisan Harper “Hope” ad and viewers of the implicit and explicit Hulshof “Values” ads rate each candidate in much more positive terms than viewers of the Choir Practice ad rate Ronnie Musgrove. Simply put, the Choir Practice ad appears less effective in terms of overall evaluations relative to the other ads, which perhaps speaks to it being taken down shortly after placed on YouTube. Although the ad produces pronounced priming effects in resonating with traditionalists, it is possible the overt religious nature of the appeal turns off viewers in general. It also should be noted that the Musgrove ad fails to address any political issues, which stands in contrast to the other ads, especially the Chambliss and Hulshof ads. Thus, it is possible the lack of substantive political information likewise renders the Choir Practice ad less effective.

### **Considering Political Sophistication as a Moderator of Backlash Effects**

As political sophistication was shown to moderate priming effects upon exposure to implicit and explicit religious appeals, I similarly consider the potential of political sophistication

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<sup>54</sup> Mean evaluations across all participants in each study were compared for each dependent variable. The partisan Harper appeals were excluded given the influence of partisan predispositions on candidate evaluations.

to moderate the effect of exposure to the adversarial information environment represented by the ad critical of religion in politics. I do so by extending regression models to include political sophistication and corresponding interactions. Specifically, I regress each dependent variable on a dummy variable corresponding to ad condition exposure (0 for No call out, 1 for Call out), religious traditionalism, sophistication and the three-way interaction, ad x tradition x sophistication as well as all lower order interactions. Results of these models are displayed in Table 7.4 below. Cell entries provide OLS estimates and standard errors for the first six dependent variables and ordinal estimates for the ordinal vote preference measure.

Accounting for the influence of political sophistication on religious priming effects alters the manner in which exposure to the call out advertisement affects viewers' evaluations of Musgrove. Recall the base regression models above found no consistent effect of exposure to the call out relative to the control condition as a function of one's religiosity. Incorporating the influence of political sophistication, however, changes that relationship. The two-way, ad x traditionalism estimates are consistently positive once sophistication is included in the model. Although none of the estimates reach statistical significance, the consistent trend points toward activation of traditionalism at low levels of sophistication upon exposure to the call out.

Of particular interest, however, are the three-way estimates, which represent the potential moderating influence of political sophistication on religious priming brought about by exposure to the treatment condition. As is evident, all three-way estimates are consistently negative indicating a general trend toward sophistication attenuating priming effects. None of the estimates, though, rise to the level of statistical significance. As with the three-way implicit models discussed above, however, the current model similarly suffers from marked collinearity<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The three-way interaction for all continuous variables yield tolerance levels of .002 and VIF statistics exceeding 450 – levels that suggest multi-collinearity is likely influencing model estimates.

brought about by inclusion of the interaction variables. Thus, consideration should also be given the consistent negative effect in lieu of focusing solely on statistical significance. From such a perspective, the overall negative findings of the three-way interaction point toward higher levels of sophistication muting priming effects emerging from exposure to the treatment condition.

Table 7.4 – The effects of political sophistication on calling out religious appeals among self-identified Christian students

<b>Effects of Political Sophistication on Calling out Religious Appeals</b>							
	<b>Trait Eval's</b>	<b>General Eval's</b>	<b>Competency</b>	<b>Affect</b>	<b>Campaign Motivation</b>	<b>Candidate Proximity</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Ad (Call-out)	-.27 (.54)	-.54 (.70)	.57 (.60)	-.64 (.62)	-.84 (.74)	-.27 (.63)	-8.93 (6.11)
Traditionalism	-.53 (.49)	-.60 (.63)	-.91^ (.55)	-1.04^ (.57)	-.23 (.67)	-.31 (.58)	-8.83 (5.49)
Sophistication	-1.02^ (.58)	-1.19 (.74)	-1.56* (.64)	-1.60* (.66)	-1.16 (.79)	-.98 (.68)	-13.87* (6.51)
Ad x Traditionalism	.59 (.66)	.89 (.85)	.95 (.74)	1.17 (.76)	.93 (.91)	.59 (.78)	12.30 (7.46)
Ad x Sophistication	.69 (.81)	.74 (1.04)	.91 (.90)	.95 (.93)	1.19 (1.10)	.27 (.95)	10.30 (9.33)
Traditionalism x Sophistication	1.44* (.72)	1.61 (.93)	2.00* (.81)	2.24** (.83)	1.25 (.99)	1.41^ (.85)	17.25* (8.13)
Ad x Tradition x Sophistication	-1.15 (.99)	-1.30 (1.27)	-1.52 (1.10)	-1.74 (1.13)	-1.37 (1.34)	-.75 (1.15)	-14.52 (11.31)
Constant	.98* (.39)	1.03* (.50)	1.20** (.44)	1.32** (.45)	.65 (.53)	.70 (.46)	-
Threshold 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-8.85
Threshold 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-7.70
Threshold 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-5.61
Threshold 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-4.19
N	165	165	165	165	165	165	165
R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.14	.15	.19	.17	.26	-

Note: Models predicting trait evaluations, general evaluations, competency, affect, motivation, candidate proximity and vote choice among a student sample. Ad variable is dummy coded with “1” corresponding to the call out condition and “0” indicating no call out condition. Cell entries provide unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

## Conclusion

Transitioning from the influence of various information environments on religious priming effects, the first part of Chapter 7 explored differential priming effects between implicit



and explicit appeals based on theoretical expectations derived from racial priming literature (e.g. Mendelberg, 2001; Huber & Lapinski, 2006). In a novel experiment testing exposure effects to an explicit religious appeal versus a subtle, non-religious campaign spot espousing a pro-life position and advocating traditional family values, results demonstrate both appeals promote candidate evaluation in terms of individual religiosity. Consistent with expectations (H4), the implicit appeal was as effective as the explicit version in activating religious traditionalism resulting in orthodox participants evaluating the ad-sponsored candidate much more favorably. Hence, candidates can effectively communicate with prospective voters through subtle methods without appearing overly religious and risking critical news coverage (Kuo, 2006).

The finding that implicit appeals are effective in activating religious considerations dovetails with prior research in other domains (e.g. Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino et al., 2002). At the same time, research has also shown priming effects, including those effects arising from implicit appeals, to be moderated by education and or political sophistication (e.g. Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). To that end, further analyses conducted on the current data demonstrate a modest effect of political sophistication to attenuate religious priming. Once these effects are parsed, evidence emerges that novices appear to be more reliant on religious beliefs upon exposure to the explicit appeal, yet fail to grasp the subtleties associated with the subtle, implicit advertisement. In contrast, the effect of traditionalism on subsequent candidate evaluations is pronounced among sophisticated viewers of the implicit appeal, thus suggesting the implicit appeal to effectively resonate with more politically astute voters.

Such findings are congruent with scholars arguing priming to be more pronounced among relative novices owing to less complex belief structures (e.g. Krosnick and Kinder, 1990) as well as academics proposing priming effects to be pronounced among sophisticates owing to more

integrated schemata necessary for priming connections to occur (e.g. Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). While current findings of priming effects for novices in the explicit condition speak to the former position, the ability of a subtle, implicit appeal to resonate with relative sophisticates buttresses the later view. Both findings, however, illustrate the importance of political sophistication in considering the effects of religious appeals on potential voters. From the strategist's perspective, employment of explicit appeals appears advantageous to court politically inattentive religious voters, while a more implicit communication strategy is likely to resonate with more astute traditionalists.

Following examination of differential effects born of implicit and explicit appeals, the chapter concluded with a return to information effects, specifically as it pertains to the potential of adversarial information environments critical of religion in politics to foster a backlash effect. Experimental results provide little evidence exposure to information critical of religion in politics adversely affects candidate evaluations or attenuates priming effects. Though a candidate may experience lower evaluations among religious progressives as exposure to a religious appeal promotes evaluation on the basis of religious beliefs more generally, there is little evidence adversarial information exacerbates negative evaluations or reduces more favorable candidate evaluations among religiously orthodox individuals. Religious traditionalism was activated among viewers of the overt religious appeal as well as viewers of the appeal followed by critical information with no noticeable reduction in evaluation among treatment participants. Consistent with hypothesized expectations (H5), calling out the use of religion in politics does not appear to promote backlash effects – at least as operationalized in the current study.

The durability of religious priming in the face of a seemingly persuasive appeal critical of the role of religion in politics likely speaks to the social acceptability of religion in greater

society. In contrast to racial priming where the norm of racial egalitarianism powerfully influences individual attitude formation such that calling out implicit racial appeals blunts priming effects, the pervasive socialization of Americans to religion likely mitigates the ability of adversarial information to attenuate religious priming effects. A caveat here is that calling out racial priming focuses on implicit appeals, as individuals automatically dismiss explicit racial appeals as a violation of egalitarian norms, while implicit appeals potentially activate latent racial attitudes beyond awareness (Mendelberg, 2001). Hence, it is possible calling out implicit religious appeals may yield demonstrable moderating effects. As noted above, however, critical commentary on the strategic use of religion by political elites typically emerges from rather overt, explicit communication as opposed to appeals to political positions that happen to tangentially activate religiosity.

Moreover, it should be noted the current experiment focuses solely on call-out effects resulting from the presence of information critical of religion in politics. Although the focus and operationalization of call-out effects in this regard is reasonable in light of the general lack of extant research exploring religious backlash effects as well as prominent critical news coverage focusing on the religiosity of political elites, the possibility exists of alternative call-out effects. Consider, given the pervasive socialization of many with religion, one questions whether call-out effects may result from candidates or organizations openly criticizing a politician's *lack of religiosity*. That is, do candidates suffer adverse effects from being characterized as nonreligious? In a similar vein, do candidates suffer backlash effects for not engaging in religious rhetoric in the context of their own campaign? A Pew Research poll conducted during the 2008 presidential campaign found 61% of respondents stating they would be less likely to support a candidate that does not believe in God (Pew, 2007). Such statistics give rise to the

possibility candidates may suffer negative effects for being perceived as insufficiently religious. Thus, future research should consider designs that account for alternative backlash effects.

At the same time, however, scholars should not entirely dismiss the possibility of adverse effects resulting from media coverage critical of a candidate's use of religion for political gain. Although the current experimental design produced little evidence of adverse effects for a candidate's religious appeal, it is possible an alternative experimental design may prove more effective at unearthing potential moderating effects of calling attention to the use of religion by politicians. Whereas the current design relied on an oblique advertisement critical of the increasing mix of religion in politics more generally, it is conceivable a more direct stimulus specifically referencing the candidate and their statements may prove more efficacious in terms of observing any attenuating effects of critical attention on priming.

Possible design inadequacies aside, however, current study results nonetheless illustrate the durability of religiosity in political evaluations. Consistent with results elaborated on in previous chapters, present findings continue to demonstrate the influential role of religion in politics.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

### Overview

It has been nearly two centuries since Alexis de Tocqueville keenly observed the interdependent relationship between religion and American democracy. Pundits and academics alike have expounded on the bond forged of religion and politics since. The last three decades, however, have witnessed marked growth in scholarship acknowledging the centrality of religion in politics with particular emphasis given the effects of religion on public opinion (see e.g. Gold & Russell, 2007; Hammond et al, 1994; Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Layman & Carmines, 1997; Putnam & Campbell, 2010; Wuthnow, 1988). In spite of a corpus of work focusing on myriad aspects of religion in American politics, there remains a lack of research examining the consequences of religious communication in political campaigns.

The current study attempts to fill this void through an empirical exploration of the effects of religious campaign appeals on prospective voters. Drawing on an array of academic literature, this interdisciplinary investigation develops a theoretical framework and subsequent expectations as to how religious appeals are likely to activate individual religiosity thereby influencing the formation of political attitudes. Hypothesized expectations are then tested through a series of controlled media priming experiments administered to college student samples and a representative cross-section of adults throughout the United States. While the first set of experiments focuses on the consequences of religious appeals in variable information environments, later experiments examine priming effects as a function of appeal type (i.e. implicit and explicit appeals) as well as the potential for candidates mounting religious campaigns to experience backlash effects among viewers exposed to media coverage critical of elites mixing religion in politics.

## **Key Findings and Limitations**

Consistent with hypothesized expectations, initial priming experiments drawn on a college student sample and a national cross-section of adults demonstrate that exposure to religious appeals activates religiosity in low-information environments leading to significant shifts in evaluations of political candidates. Absent existing knowledge of a candidate, student and adult viewers alike, when presented a solitary religious campaign appeal, cue on the religious components in the ad and subsequently evaluate the candidate in keeping with their religious views. More specifically, and consistent with the culture wars literature (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988), priming effects are shown to be most pronounced based on religious traditionalism – that is, one’s religious beliefs relative to religious commitment or affiliation with a particular religious tradition or denomination. Those individuals holding more orthodox religious beliefs become significantly more likely to evaluate a candidate favorably following exposure to an appeal incorporating religious cues.

Further parsing of priming effects through conditional effects analyses, however, demonstrate modest differences between student and adult experimental participants. While both age groups demonstrate significant priming effects such that exposure to religious cues results in the activation of religious traditionalism thereby leading to significant changes in candidate evaluations, subtle differences emerge in the locus of religious effects. Exposure to religious cues appears to be more consequential for students at lower levels of traditionalism as evidenced by relative progressives adversely evaluating an ad-sponsored candidate. In contrast, priming effects are more pronounced at higher levels of traditionalism among adults in a nationally representative sample. In essence, for adults, a disproportionate effect occurs among religious

traditionalists as they become far more favorable toward a candidate, while greater priming effects emerge among religiously progressive students resulting in less favorable evaluations.

When these models are expanded to account for exposure to additional, non-partisan candidate information, religious priming effects among students and adults are reduced. That is, when individuals possess more political knowledge about a candidate prior to viewing a religious campaign appeal, they become less reliant on religious traditionalism in formulating evaluations of a candidate. Confirming hypothesized expectations, relatively complex information environments effectively attenuate religious priming effects, thus suggesting religion to become less applicable in the face of increasingly diverse, secular political information.

It is important to note, however, the presence of additional secular information does not completely displace religious evaluation; rather, it merely diminishes reliance on religion. Traditionalism continues to exert a significant influence on the formation of political attitudes regardless of information environment complexity. Simply put, religion remains a consequential consideration in the minds of voters upon exposure to ads incorporating religious themes and imagery. Nevertheless, results speak to the fact that potential voters are cognizant of competing considerations when provided additional politically relevant campaign information. Far from formulating decisions based solely on their particular religious beliefs, individuals thoughtfully weigh competing religious and political considerations when evaluating political candidates. Such findings reinforce the beneficial aspects of competitive campaigns offering more substantive information environments (Kahn & Kenney, 1999).

Similar to the attenuation effects of additional non-partisan political information, exposure to partisan cues in religious campaign advertisements likewise alters voter calculus by reducing reliance on religion. As anticipated, exposure to a religious appeal absent any partisan

cue results in a robust relationship between religiosity and subsequent posttest political evaluations. The inclusion of partisan cues in religious campaign appeals, however, simultaneously reduces the impact of religiosity on evaluations while strengthening partisan-based evaluations. In essence, the presence of partisan cues serves to activate existing political predispositions thereby promoting partisan priming at the expense of religious priming.

The finding that religious evaluation is influenced by exposure to partisan cues is congruent with a wealth of research that has consistently demonstrated the powerful effect one's partisan preferences exert on political behavior (e.g. Campbell et al, 1960; Downs, 1957; Nie et al, 1976; Popkin, 1991; Lewis-Beck et al, 2008). In spite of the reduction in religious-based evaluation brought about by exposure to partisan cues, religious beliefs nonetheless remain consequential in shaping political attitudes. As demonstrated, religious traditionalism significantly influenced the perceptions held by self-identified Republicans of a Democratic candidate such that those embracing more orthodox beliefs responded more favorably than self-identified Democrats. Indeed, religiously traditional Republicans even responded they would be more likely to actively campaign for a Democratic candidate upon exposure to an appeal presenting a candidate in a religious light. Hence, one's religiosity plays a potent role in shaping political attitudes even in the presence of an influential, incongruent partisan prime.

As results clearly demonstrate, religiosity heavily influences prospective voters' perceptions of political figures. At the same time, study findings illustrate these effects become modified in differing information environments. Thus, the environment in which religious appeals are deployed is a critical factor in determining their relative effect on voters. Additional information, be it partisan or non-partisan, influences individual reliance on religion as a consideration in the development of political decisions.



Transitioning away from the consequential role of information environments to influence the manner in which religious appeals resonate with particular voters, the study additionally examined the relative effectiveness of alternative appeal types. Relying heavily on racial priming literature (Mendelberg, 1997, 2001; Huber & Lapinski, 2006), theoretical expectations were developed suggesting implicit and explicit appeals to be equally effective in activating religious traditionalism. Such expectations, as noted, run counter to theories of racial priming, principally owing to the social acceptance of religion. As anticipated, both implicit and explicit appeals prime religious traditionalism culminating in significant effects on candidate evaluations. Hence, candidates, to the extent they draw on issues wedded to religion, can effectively activate the religious beliefs of prospective voters without overtly referencing religion, and thereby risk alienating voters or generating critical press coverage (Domke & Coe, 2008; Kuo, 2006).

Further explication of these effects suggests political sophistication to moderate the manner in which implicit and explicit appeals resonate with voters. While explicit appeals appear more consequential in shaping the perceptions of political novices, implicit appeals activate traditionalism among political sophisticates. The influential nature of overt appeals to prime the politically inattentive dovetails with research suggesting novices to be more susceptible to priming effects (e.g. Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Likewise, activation of traditionalism among relative sophisticates speaks to more integrated schemata capable of connecting policy positions of the implicit appeal with religious stances (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Much like information environments influence the effect of religious appeals on potential voters, the personal characteristics of individuals in terms of interest in and knowledge of politics likewise appear to shape the manner in which appeals resonate with one's religious beliefs.

Returning to the effect of information environments on priming effects, formal analysis concluded with an examination of possible backlash effects by exploring whether candidates are adversely affected by media coverage critical of the presence of religion in politics. Once again, given the socialization of many voters with religion, expectations suggested little likelihood of backlash effects for candidates mounting religious campaigns. As expected, exposure to a critical advertisement of the influence of religion in politics produced no significant adverse effects among individuals first exposed to a candidate's explicit religious appeal. Candidates do not suffer a significant decline in evaluations when being "called out" for employing a religious strategy – at least as demonstrated by experimental designs employed in the current study. Indeed, social acceptance of religion in American society appears to insulate candidates from suffering backlash effects for being called out for advancing religious themes. Results in this regard tend to validate the observation of scholars in noting some of the most successful politicians in recent years, especially in presidential politics, have not coincidentally been some of the most effective and overt communicators of religious messaging (Domke & Coe, 2008).

As study findings make clear, one's religion plays a critical role in shaping how prospective voters evaluate political figures. Specifically, religious beliefs emerge as the most diagnostic dimension by which religious appeals resonate with individuals. It is consistently the case, across multiple advertisements analyzed, that exposure to religious appeals activates traditionalism, and those participants embracing more orthodox beliefs respond by evaluating candidates in significantly more favorable terms relative to individuals embracing religiously progressive doctrine. While these effects are attenuated in more complex partisan and non-partisan environments, religiosity continues to exert a marked influence on the formation of political attitudes.

As noted, study results further confirm the ability of candidates to speak to potential voters through both implicit and explicit methods. Indeed, candidates need not overtly reference religion to communicate with religious voters. Rather, by appealing to issues that have become effectively wedded to religious positions, candidates can craft messages that resonate with individuals without having to formally espouse religious themes or imagery.

Taken as a whole, the study speaks to the consequential nature of religion in politics, especially the deeply personal, yet influential role religion plays in informing the political attitudes of many individuals. At the same time, the study illustrates the influential role of media in politics, for it is through agents of media that politics is communicated. Consistent with a corpus of literature, study results, yet again, paint a persuasive picture of the power of political priming (see Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007 for extensive review). Just as scholars have noted the ability of news coverage to influence individual perceptions of political figures (e.g. Goidel et al., 1997; Hetherington, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), the current study extends priming to religious campaign communication in confirming the ability of religiously-infused campaign appeals to significantly influence the perceptions voters hold of prospective candidates.

Such findings, however, should be considered in light of study limitations. While results provide compelling evidence of priming effects and the influential role of religious appeals on prospective voters, the experimental nature of the studies necessarily limits generalizability. Indeed, the experimental designs carried out in both a sterile media effects lab and through online survey providers potentially introduce ecological bias owing to the artificial environments in which participants viewed stimuli and completed questionnaires. Moreover, the studies make use of college student samples, which, as noted, have been criticized for producing spurious results relative to research drawn on representative adult samples (Sears, 1986).

Having stated these concerns, it is important to note the study additionally incorporates a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. The fact religious priming effects emerge within student and adult samples lends validity to the overall effects likely to be observed in the electorate at large. In contrast to previous research exploring the effects of religious messaging (Calfano & Djupe, 2009), the study intentionally employs political advertisements deployed in actual campaigns to more accurately reflect the content and manner of religious messaging presented potential voters. In spite of such efforts to improve external validity, caution should nonetheless be observed in extrapolating effects to all voters. Although the experiments provide valuable insight into effects resulting from exposure to religious appeals, further research as described below should be undertaken to more fully explicate the influence of religious messaging in political campaigns.

### **Contributions and Future Research**

Limitations aside, however, the current study offers important contributions to advancing understanding of the role of religion in modern American political campaigns. It does so by providing empirical data to both confirm and qualify popular conceptions of how religion affects potential voters. Moreover, study results simultaneously provide practical insight into the use of religious appeals as a campaign strategy.

Scholars and pundits alike have long argued political elites have benefitted through communicating targeted messages at religious voters, particularly Christian evangelicals (e.g. Domke & Coe, 2008; Kuo, 2006), yet surprisingly little research has empirically examined that proposition (but see Calfano & Djupe, 2009; Weber & Thornton, 2012). The current study, however, provides empirical data to buttress that argument. Indeed, experimental results across student and adult samples alike confirm the ability of religious appeals, even subtle implicit

appeals, to significantly influence evaluations of political figures. Results clearly and consistently substantiate that the manner and content of religious political messaging is critical to the formation of political attitudes. Moreover, these results are bolstered by confirmation across a national cross section of U.S. adults based on effects originating from “real world” advertisements previously deployed in actual political campaigns.

Further, from the standpoint of political campaigns, results offer insight for campaign strategists considering the deployment of religious appeals. As noted, caution should be taken in overstating the significance of experimental results. Having stated that, study findings suggest limited downside to mounting religious appeals, especially among adult Christian voters. While results of the Saxby Chambliss experiments suggest a general roll off of support for Chambliss among college participants, a net positive effect emerged among adult subjects exposed to religious appeals. Hence, candidates and their campaigns would seemingly benefit from a dual strategy of foregoing religious appeals among younger constituents, while simultaneously courting older Christian voters through religious messaging.

Study findings likewise speak to the relative benefits of implicit and explicit messaging. Although both implicit and explicit appeals resonate with self-identified Christians, implicit messaging appears more effective at reaching political sophisticates. Explicit messaging, however, more effectively resonates with relative novices. Thus, to the extent a voting public is comprised of more politically attentive voters, candidates would be well advised to consider more implicit communication. Conversely, campaigns operating in low-information environments and catering to less politically sophisticated constituencies should thoughtfully weigh the benefits of more explicit messaging.

Beyond empirically confirming the ability of religious messaging to resonate with religious individuals and informing campaign strategy, the study additionally contributes to a better understanding of how one's religious beliefs influence the formation of political attitudes and how information environments subsequently alter reliance on religion. Although popular media accounts often conceive of voters in rather monolithic terms such as the "female vote," "Hispanic vote" or "religious vote," – as if all voted in lockstep – study results paint a much more nuanced picture of religion and its influence on voters. Indeed, far from uniformity, study results demonstrate stark differences in how religious appeals resonate with voters based on their particular religious beliefs. While there is a tendency for exposure to religious appeals to result in modestly lower evaluations among religious progressives, there is a concomitant effect among relatively orthodox viewers yielding far more favorable candidate evaluations.

At the same time, results based on manipulations of information environments illustrate that religious individuals thoughtfully consider alternative politically relevant information when forming political evaluations. While religion remains an important consideration in the calculus of religious voters, complex information environments presenting additional political information, be it of a partisan or non-partisan nature, appear to promote decreased reliance on individual religious beliefs and proportionately greater reliance on other political considerations.

Such a shift in reliance on alternative considerations speaks to the possibility of underlying applicability effects driving the priming process. While the current study advances priming literature through its extension of priming to religious campaign communications, additional research should consider further explication of the psychological process underpinning priming, especially in light of current study findings. Indeed, project findings hint that religious priming may be, to a great extent, a function of applicability as opposed to accessibility effects.

Priming effects have traditionally been explained in terms of construct accessibility, the process by which recently activated constructs become more likely to move from long-term to working memory and thus accessible for evaluation (Domke, Shah & Wackman, 1998; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Zaller, 1992). Current results, however, simultaneously suggest the presence of applicability effects, which speak to the relationship, or fit, between the characteristics of accessible constructs and stimulus features (Althaus & Mie Kim, 2006; Higgins, 1989; Higgins & Chaires, 1980). Mental constructs demonstrating a better fit and thus deemed more appropriate in a particular context are more likely to be relied on in evaluation (Higgins, 1996).

Consider, in low information conditions absent diverse political information, voters rely heavily on their religious beliefs upon exposure to religious appeals. The significant moderating effects of relatively complex information environments, however, suggest individuals deem religious beliefs less applicable as an evaluative standard for prospective candidates when presented alternative political information. Such findings call for further examination of the psychological antecedents of religious priming effects. Indeed, although the current study importantly extends research into priming with its focus on the consequences of religious appeals, additional exploration of underlying psychological determinants would be helpful in simultaneously promoting greater understanding of the influence of religious communication on voter behavior and the priming process in general.

Beyond exploration of the psychological mechanisms underpinning religious priming, results additionally call for further examination of priming effects in alternative information environments. While the current study focuses on information environments characterized by additional non-partisan candidate information as well as general partisan cues, it remains unclear how religious appeals resonate in other environments, particularly competitive information

environments. As candidates typically face opposition, one questions how contrasting information from an opposing candidate may influence the effect of religious appeals on prospective voters.

Similarly, as elections, and particularly competitive campaigns, are newsworthy events, further examination of news environments would be beneficial in understanding how religion operates in political campaigns. Does news coverage of the deployment of religious appeals and the use of religion in campaigns impact the effectiveness of religious messaging? The introduction of this dissertation referenced earned media coverage former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee received after airing his “Believe” ad in the 2008 Iowa caucus, which seemingly aided the relatively underfunded candidate in courting Iowa Republican voters, many of whom self identified as Christian evangelicals (Langer, 2008; Luo, 2007; Parker, 2007).

At the same time, political elites “narrowcast” religious messaging in part to avoid generating critical news coverage (Kuo, 2006). Indeed, as noted above, multiple Republican candidates in the recent 2012 GOP primary campaign were the subject of critical news coverage regarding their religious beliefs (e.g. Goldberg, 2011; Lizza, 2011; Wilder, 2011). Hence, additional research into news coverage of religion in campaigns would help shed light on how such coverage influences voters. Although experimental results in the current study found no adverse effects brought about by exposure to an advertisement critical of religion in politics more generally, it remains to be seen how news coverage may influence potential voters.

Moreover, and as noted in the discussion of Chapter 7, additional research should be undertaken to examine alternative call-out or backlash effects. While the current study focused on potential adverse effects emerging from exposure to critical coverage of religion in politics more generally, it is plausible alternative effects may emerge from candidates being portrayed as



insufficiently religious. Conversely, it remains to be seen what effects, if any, may emerge from candidates counter arguing their religious beliefs should not be questioned. Such alternative conceptualizations of potential call-out effects provide multiple avenues of future research.

Perhaps the most fruitful stream of future research in the area of religion in campaigns, however, focuses on the actual deployment of religious appeals by political candidates. While the current study intentionally focuses on micro-level aspects in an attempt to ascertain how religious appeals resonate with individual voters, study findings give rise to how religious appeals are likely to emerge in electoral contests. Indeed, experimental results provide the foundation to derive informed expectations that could be tested vis-à-vis examination of actual advertising data. Given the pronounced effects of religious appeals in resonating with more religiously traditional individuals, for example, one would expect religious ads to air disproportionately in more religiously conservative ad markets.

Similarly, the fact religious appeals resonate based on traditionalism with more orthodox viewers responding favorably would suggest religious appeals to be more prevalent in Republican primaries, as religious traditionalists have increasingly aligned with the Republican Party (Fowler et al., 2004; Guth et al., 2006; Layman, 2001; Manza & Brooks, 1999). As Republican candidates moderate their positions in an attempt to court swing voters (Downs, 1957), however, fewer religious appeals are likely to appear by GOP candidates in competitive general elections. Conversely, to the extent Democratic candidates attempt to court increasingly traditional voters over the course of a campaign, we should observe more religious appeals aired by Democratic candidates in general campaigns. As evidenced by experimental results, incorporating religious cues in political ads powerfully influences increasingly traditional

viewers to the point self-identified Republican traditionalists become far more likely to support a Democratic candidate.

The proposition religious appeals are likely to emerge within Republican primaries and, conversely, to be deployed by Democratic candidates more often in general elections represents just two conclusions drawn from the current study that could be extended as avenues of research exploring the actual use of religious appeals in campaigns. Indeed, the implications of current study results as applied to the practical deployment of religious appeals offer multiple avenues of future research.

Beyond further research examining the practical implications of the current study, a final word should be mentioned regarding exploration of religious priming in alternative political and religious landscapes and among differing ideologies. The current investigation emphasizes religious messaging designed to court Christian voters in the U.S., a logical focus given the historical religious tradition of the U.S. and the fact Christian voters comprise the overwhelming majority of voters. Nonetheless, questions arise as to how religious priming effects might play out for other religions and in other political and religious environments.

In theory, candidates should be able to prime other religious traditions and in other political contexts. That is, the psychology of priming should extend to other religious domains. Having stated that, admittedly, the U.S. is unique among Western nations for its marked religious observance. Thus, research exploring the extent to which religious appeals resonate with voters of alternative faiths and nationalities provides an intriguing avenue to extend the current project.

Likewise, future research should more thoroughly consider the effects of religious appeals through the lens of political ideology, especially as it relates to how religious messaging functions for the political “left.” While the current study demonstrates exposure to tested

religious appeals results in a modest decline in evaluations among religious progressives, who happen to be disproportionately liberal, noted Democratic and liberal politicians have nonetheless appealed to religion with seeming success – perhaps the most notable example being former President Bill Clinton (Domke & Coe, 2008). As voters prefer candidates closest to their political ideology (Down, 1957), perhaps more Democratic and liberal politicians are necessarily insulated from backlash effects from religious progressives, especially in general campaigns, as religious progressives are more likely to support liberal candidates over conservative candidates on nonreligious policy dimensions. Such reasoning would simultaneously explain President Clinton’s support from both liberal and moderate voting publics, in spite of marked religious rhetoric that had the potential to alienate more religiously progressive individuals.

At the same time, however, consideration should be given the content of religious messaging in terms of ideology. Perhaps the “left” and “right” employ qualitatively different religious appeals yielding quantitatively different effects for religious progressives and traditionalists. In this vein, it is worth noting that three of the four campaign appeals tested in the current study were disseminated of Republicans, with the lone exception the Musgrove advertisement. All four ads, including the Democratic Musgrove ad, however, generated similar effects in promoting heightened evaluations among traditionalists and modestly rolling off among progressives. Nonetheless, potential priming effects in terms of differences in content of religious appeals across ideologically distinct candidates warrants further examination.

As is evident, the current study gives rise to numerous avenues of future research likely to produce meaningful results to advance understanding of the consequences of religious appeals in political campaigns. Only through continued thoughtful and rigorous research can we gain insight into the influential role of religion in modern American politics and beyond.

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## APPENDIX

### Experiment #1 IRB Approval

#### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb/screeningmembers.shtml>
  - A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
    - (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru E.
    - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
    - (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
      - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
    - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
    - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.
- Training link: ( <http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php> )

1) Principal Investigator: Matthew Thornton Rank: Ph.D Student

Dept.: Mass Comm Ph: 417-529-9539 E-mail: mtThor11@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

\* If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

\* Rosanne Scholl, Assistant Professor

204 Hodges Hall

608-347-0788

rscholl@lsu.edu

3) Project Examination of political communication in Campaign 2008

Title:

4) LSU Proposal? (yes or no) No If Yes, LSU Proposal Number \_\_\_\_\_

Also, if YES, either ☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) Mass Comm. and/or Poly Sci. students

• Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Matthew Thornton \*\* Date 10/9/08 (no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Student\*? Y/N Y

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 10-09-2011

IRB# 54924 LSU Proposal# \_\_\_\_\_  
☒ Complete Application  
☒ Human Subjects Training

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ Category/Paragraph 2a

Reviewer Anne Osborne Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date 10-13-08

## Experiment #2 – IRB Approval

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board  
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irb@lsu.edu  
lsu.edu/irb

- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml>
- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  - (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
  - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
  - (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
    - \*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
  - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://php.nihtaining.com/users/login.php>.)

1) Principal Investigator:  Ph:  Rank   
Dept:  Ph:  E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each  
\*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Chris Weber, Asst. Professor  
Dept. of Political Science  
217 Stubbs Hall - crweber@lsu.edu - 225-578-6395

3) Project Title:

4) Proposal? (yes or no)  If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either ☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant  
OR ☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other) Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature  Date  (no per signatures)

**\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete.** If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ Category/Paragraph   
Reviewer  Signature  Date

### Part 1: Determination of "Research" and Potential For Risk

- This section determines whether the project meets the Department of Health and Human Services (HSS) definition of research involving human subjects, and if not, whether it nevertheless presents more than "minimal risk" to human subjects that makes IRB review prudent and necessary.

ES111

IRB#	LSU Proposal #
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Complete Application
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Human Subjects Training

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 5-25-2013



## Experiment #3 – IRB Approval

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

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-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.

(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)

(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

\*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)

(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtaining.com/users/login.php>.)

(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://www.lsu.edu/irb/IRB%20Security%20of%20Data.pdf>)



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
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1) Principal Investigator: Matthew Thornton

Rank: Ph. D. Student

Dept: Mass Communication

Ph: 417-529-9539

E-mail: [mthor11@lsu.edu](mailto:mthor11@lsu.edu)

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

Christopher Weber, Asst. Professor  
Dept. of Political Science  
225-578-6395  
[crweber@lsu.edu](mailto:crweber@lsu.edu)

IRB# LSU 73 LSU Proposal #

☒ Complete Application

☒ Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title: Political communication in American politics -- Study 3

**Study Exempted By:**  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 9-20-2014

4) Proposal? (yes or no) ☒ No

If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either

☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) Mass Communication students

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other) Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature

*Matthew Thornton*

Date

9/21/11

(no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ Category/Paragraph

Reviewer

*Lisa Lundy*

Signature

*Lisa Lundy*

Date

9/21/11

## Experiment #4 – IRB Approval

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

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(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://www.lsu.edu/irb/IRB%20Security%20of%20Data.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Matthew Thornton

Rank: Ph. D. Student

Dept: Mass Communication

Ph: 417-529-9539

E-mail: mthor11@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

Christopher Weber, Asst. Professor  
Dept. of Political Science  
225-578-6395  
crweber@lsu.edu

IRB# E5675

LSU Proposal #



Complete Application



Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title: Political communication in American politics – Study 1

Study Exempted By:

Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)

Exemption Expires: 9-20-2014

4) Proposal? (yes or no) No

If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either

☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) Mass Communication students

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature

*Matthew Thornton*

Date

9/21/11

(no per signatures)

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Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒

Not Exempted ☐

Category/Paragraph

Reviewer

*Lisa Lundy*

Signature

*Lisa Lundy*

Date

9/21/11

## Experiment #5 – IRB Approval

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

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[lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

1) Principal Investigator:  Rank:   
Dept:  Ph:  E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

Christopher Weber, Asst. Professor  
Dept. of Political Science  
225-578-6395  
[crweber@lsu.edu](mailto:crweber@lsu.edu)

IRB# E5694 LSU Proposal #

☒ Complete Application

☒ Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

Study Exempted By:

Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
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225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)

Exemption Expires: 9-20-2014

4) Proposal? (yes or no) ☐ No ☐ If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either

☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature  Date  (no per signatures)

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Screening Committee Action: Exempted ☒ Not Exempted ☐ Category/Paragraph

Reviewer  Signature  Date

## Experiment #1 & #2 Saxby Chambliss Web site (Information Factor)

### Meet the Candidate

*This is the website of Saxby Chambliss for U.S. Senate. Please read Saxby's views on the issues. Once you have finished reading the website, you will watch a political advertisement and complete some questions about Saxby Chambliss.*



### **SAXBY CHAMBLISS for U.S. SENATE**

### On the Issues

- **Economy**  
*I believe we must make certain that we promote American manufacturing and work to benefit the small business community in this country, as that is where the majority of the jobs in this country are created. Most importantly, I am opposed to raising taxes and increasing the size of government.*
- **Taxes**  
*I support lower taxes to put more money back into the pockets of working American families. We must continue working to eliminate the marriage penalty, the capital gains tax on investments, the death tax, and further lower marginal tax rates across the board for working men and women. I also support implementation of the FairTax, which would shift the federal government's method of revenue collection from income to personal consumption.*
- **Energy**  
*If we are to have national security and economic independence, we need to reduce our dependence upon foreign sources of energy. I will support policies that increase the diversification of energy sources and develop domestic sources of energy, including drilling for oil, mining coal, and developing hydroelectric, wind, and alternative energy sources.*
- **Education**  
*As the husband of a teacher who worked for more than 30 years in the classroom, I know there is no more important job than educating America's young people. I'm a proud supporter of the landmark education reform law, No Child Left Behind, which seeks to ensure America's children are reaching their learning potential.*
- **Second Amendment**  
*As an avid sportsman, I have been and will always be a staunch supporter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. Throughout my career I've always defended the rights of law abiding Americans to bear arms for not only recreation, but also protection.*

## Experimental Stimuli – Ad Copy

### Experiment #1 & #2 – 2008 Saxby Chambliss “Values” Ad

“I believe the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are as relevant today as when they were written. I believe the American Dream is more possible today than ever before. I believe in hard work, and I believe individuals should be able to keep the money they earn rather than having it taken away from them in the form of high and unfair taxes.

I believe in personal choices, not government dictates. I believe Americans should be able to choose their doctors, choose their schools *and choose how they worship*. I believe in capitalism and competition. *I believe in a loving and all-powerful God.*

My beliefs and values require me to fight for smaller government, lower taxes, *the sanctity of life*, the rights of individuals, for personal freedoms and responsibilities and the right of each of us to help our children seek their dreams without government trying to control our lives.

I’m Saxby Chambliss, and I approve this message. I ask for your vote on November 4<sup>th</sup>.”

### Experiment #3 – 2008 Gregg Harper “Hope” Ad

“I’ve probably learned the greatest lesson on how to treat people from my son Livingston, who has special needs.

*He is a blessing* not just in our lives, but in so many lives.

*He’s brought to life what we read in the Bible*, and that means you put others ahead of yourself.

*Those values will be the values I take to Congress, and to carry what I believe is a servant’s heart* for the people in our district and to take that to Washington.

I’m Gregg Harper, and I approve this message.”

### Experiment #4 – 2008 Kenny Hulshof “Values” Ad

“I spent my career as a prosecutor protecting victims. As governor , I’ll fight to protect our values. The value of hard work. That’s why government needs to lower taxes.

*The value of life and the traditional family. The value of moral clarity.* You do what is right no matter what the political consequences.

I’m running for governor because I believe Missouri’s government ought to be as good as its people. I’m Kenny Hulshof, and I’d be honored to have your support.

For Governor, the candidate is Kenny Hulshof.”

### **Experiment #5 – 2008 DSCC Ronnie Musgrove “Choir Practice” Ad**

“As a Christian, we have a sense of duty, obligation, responsibility and more importantly desire to help people in need.

It’s what the Bible teaches. It’s what our Sunday school class teaches. It’s what Christ taught. And if we can’t have a sense of compassion to help people out, then it goes against the flow of what the Bible teaches us.

To me, when we see people hurting, we should reach out to help them. That’s what I’ve been taught ever since I was a child in church. That’s why I sing in the choir. To me, that’s what being a Christian is about. That’s what being a public servant is about.”

### **Experiment #5 – 2008 First Freedom First “Democracy not Theocracy” Ad**

“History is full of stories about good governments gone bad because they started telling people what they could and couldn't believe.

Religion and spirituality are deeply personal decisions. It is not the role of government to dictate a statewide religion; that's what the separation of church and state is all about. It protects all of us from having our beliefs compromised by people who might disagree.

Safeguarding everyone's religious liberty is what we need to survive as a free society. Separation of church and state protects all of us against interference in our decisions about faith; we need to keep it this way. Sometimes we take it for granted, but we shouldn't.

Religious freedom is America’s bravest invention.

People came across oceans, to believe, freely, openly, each of us, differently, differently, differently, together.

But if we protect one belief over another, if we favor one religion and not the other, then we surrender that right, and sacrifice them all.

Mixing religion and government has made a mess of things in other countries. I’m glad for the freedom our democracy gives us.”

## Survey Instrument #1

### Pretest – Political Awareness

Some people constantly follow politics, while others aren't that interested in it. How interested are you in politics?

1. Very interested
2. Interested
3. Not interested
4. Not interested at all

How closely do you pay attention to what is going on in government and politics?

1. Very Closely
2. Closely
3. Not Closely
4. Not closely at all

What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi currently hold?

1. Treasury Secretary
2. Senate Majority Leader
3. Speaker of the House
4. Secretary of State
5. Supreme Court Justice

What job or political office does Bobby Jindal currently hold?

1. Senator
2. Governor
3. Congressman
4. Attorney General
5. Secretary of State

What are the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution called?

- 1 Articles of Confederation
- 2 Declaration of Independence
- 3 Bill of Rights
- 4 States Rights
- 5 Federalist Papers

What is the term in years of a U.S. Senator?

1. 2
2. 3
3. 4
4. 5
5. 6

What is the name of the current Senate Majority Leader?

1. Trent Lott
2. Nancy Pelosi
3. John Roberts
4. Harry Reid
5. Newt Gingrich

Thinking about the issue of abortion, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly pro choice and 7 representing strongly pro life, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Pro Choice    1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Pro Life

Thinking about the issue of legalizing gay marriage, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support legalizing gay marriage and 7 representing strongly oppose legalizing gay marriage, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of stem cell research, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support government funding of stem cell research and 7 representing strongly oppose government funding of stem cell research, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of school prayer, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support prayer in school and 7 representing strongly oppose prayer in school, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities and 7 representing strongly oppose posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of individual gun rights, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support the right of individuals to own firearms and 7 representing strongly oppose the right of individuals to own firearms, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

#### PID

When supporting a candidate, how important is it that a candidate share your political views?

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Not Important
4. Not Important at All



Thinking about your political ideology, please rate yourself on the following scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means very liberal and 7 means very conservative.

Very Liberal    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        Very Conservative

Generally speaking, which political party do you affiliate yourself with?

1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Independent
4. Green
5. Libertarian
6. Other

How strongly do you identify with this political party where 1 means very weak and 7 means very strong.

Very Weak    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        Very Strong

### Religion

When supporting a candidate, how important is that a candidate share your religious views?

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Indifferent
4. Unimportant
5. Very Unimportant

How important is it that political officials hold strong religious beliefs?

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Unimportant
4. Very Unimportant

Thinking about your religion, do you consider yourself to be?

1. Mainline Protestant
2. Evangelical Protestant
3. Unaffiliated/Non-denominational Protestant
4. Black Protestant
5. Roman Catholic
6. Jewish
7. Muslim
8. Not religious
9. Other

Thinking about religion, how important would you say religion is in your life?

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Indifferent
4. Unimportant
5. Very Unimportant

Which pair of terms below best describes your religious views?

1. Fundamentalist/Evangelical
2. Traditional/Conservative
3. Mainline/Moderate
4. Progressive/Liberal
5. Not religious

Which of the following statements best describes your view of religious tradition?

1. We should strive to preserve beliefs and practices
2. We should strive to adapt beliefs and practices to new times.
3. We should strive to adopt new beliefs and practices.
4. Don't believe in religion

Which of the following best describes how often you attend church or a place of worship?

1. Never
2. Only for holidays, funerals or weddings
3. About once a month
4. About once a week
5. Multiple times a week

Which of the following best describes how often you pray?

1. Never
2. Less than once a month
3. About once a month
4. About once a week
5. About once a day
6. Multiple times a day

Which of the following best describes how often you read the Bible?

1. Multiple times a day
2. About once a day
3. About once a week
4. About once a month
5. Less than once a month
6. Never

Which of the following best describes how often you take part in activities of a church or place of worship other than attending service?

1. Never
2. About once or twice a year
3. About once a month
4. About once a week
5. Multiple times a week

Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the Bible?

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally.
3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.

How certain is your belief in God?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in God

How certain is your belief in heaven?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in Heaven

How certain is your belief in the devil?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in the devil

How certain is your belief in hell?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in hell

How certain is your belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God

### **Posttest**

Did you have any problem viewing the ad?

1. Yes
2. No

Were you able to hear the ad? 1. Yes 2. No

### Manipulation Check

Which of the following best describes this ad?

1. It was an ad for Kathleen Sebelius, candidate for Governor.
2. It was an ad for John McCain, candidate for President.
3. It was an ad for Saxby Chambliss, candidate for Senate.
4. It was an ad about our dependence on foreign oil.

### Traits

We will now ask you a few questions about how well certain terms describe Saxby Chambliss. Thinking about Saxby Chambliss, how well does the term { WISE; FRIENDLY; SINCERE; MORAL; STRONG; UNQUALIFIED; UNINTELLIGENT; IRRESPONSIBLE; DISHONEST; UNCARING } describe Saxby Chambliss?

1. Extremely well
2. Fairly well
3. No opinion
4. Not too well
5. Not well at all

### Affect

Thinking about Saxby Chambliss, does Saxby Chambliss make you feel HOPEFUL?

1. Very hopeful
2. Somewhat hopeful
3. Not very hopeful
4. Not hopeful at all

Does Saxby Chambliss make you feel ANGRY?

1. Very angry
2. Somewhat angry
3. Not very angry
4. Not angry at all

Does Saxby Chambliss make you feel PROUD?

1. Very Proud
2. Somewhat proud
3. Not very proud
4. Not proud at all

Does Saxby Chambliss make you feel DISAPPOINTED?

1. Very disappointed
2. Somewhat disappointed
3. Not very disappointed
4. Not disappointed at all

### General Evaluations

On a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates "very negative" and 100 indicates "very positive," how would you rate your feelings toward Saxby Chambliss?

On a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates "dislike very much" and 100 indicates "like very much," how would you rate how much you like Saxby Chambliss?

### Competency

55. Thinking about Saxby Chambliss, how competent do you think Saxby Chambliss would be in dealing with {ECONOMIC; HEALTH CARE; FOREIGN POLICY; EDUCATION; SOCIAL} issues?

1. Competent
2. Somewhat competent
3. Somewhat incompetent
4. Incompetent

### Proximity

How much do you agree with the statement: Saxby Chambliss shares my political views.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

How much do you agree with the statement: Saxby Chambliss shares my religious views.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

### Vote

Regardless if you plan to vote, if you could, how likely would you be to vote for Saxby Chambliss?

1. Very Likely
2. Likely
3. Unlikely
4. Very Unlikely

### Candidate PID

Thinking about the political ideology of Saxby Chambliss, on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being very liberal and 7 very conservative, where would you place Saxby Chambliss?

Very Liberal    1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very Conservative

Would you say Saxby Chambliss is a

1. Democrat
2. Republican
3. Independent
4. Green
5. Libertarian

How strongly would you identify Saxby Chambliss with this party/political stance?

Very Weak    1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very Strong

### Candidate religion

How important is it that public officials and politicians rely on religion and their religious values to guide their decisions?

1. Very Important
2. Somewhat Important
3. Somewhat Unimportant
4. Not at all Important

How much do you think Saxby Chambliss relies on religion and religious values in his decisions?

Strongly Relies on Religion   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Does not rely on religion at all

#### Religious Guidance

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about political ISSUES?

1. Very Much                      2. Somewhat                      3. Not Very Much                      4. Not at All

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about political CANDIDATES?

1. Very Much                      2. Somewhat                      3. Not Very Much                      4. Not at All

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about PUBLIC OFFICIALS?

1. Very Much                      2. Somewhat                      3. Not Very Much                      4. Not at All

Most people rely on their religious values in forming their political beliefs.

1. Strongly Agree                      2. Agree                      3. Disagree                      4. Strongly Disagree

#### Public Religion

How much do you agree with the statement: Organized religious groups should stand up for their beliefs in politics.

1. Strongly Agree                      2. Agree                      3. Disagree                      4. Strongly Disagree

How much do you agree with the statement: Public funding should be available to churches and houses of worship to provide social services for the needy?

1. Strongly Agree                      2. Agree                      3. Disagree                      4. Strongly Disagree

How much do you agree with the statement: Local communities should be allowed to post the Ten Commandments and other religious symbols in public buildings if the majority agree?

1. Strongly Disagree                      2. Disagree                      3. Agree                      4. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: There should be daily prayer in all public schools?

1. Strongly Disagree                      2. Disagree                      3. Agree                      4. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: Organized religious groups of all kinds should stay out of politics?

1. Strongly Disagree                      2. Disagree                      3. Agree                      4. Strongly Agree

#### Saxby Issues

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of abortion, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly pro choice and 7 representing strongly pro life, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Pro Choice   1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7 Strongly Pro Life

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of legalizing gay marriage, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support legalizing gay marriage and 7 representing strongly oppose legalizing gay marriage, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Support    1       2       3       4       5       6       7    Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of stem cell research, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support government funding of stem cell research and 7 representing strongly oppose government funding of stem cell research, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Support    1       2       3       4       5       6       7    Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of school prayer, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support prayer in school and 7 representing strongly oppose prayer in school, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Support    1       2       3       4       5       6       7    Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities and 7 representing strongly oppose posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Support    1       2       3       4       5       6       7    Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the Saxby Chambliss commercial you just watched and the issue of individual gun rights, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support the right of individuals to own firearms and 7 representing strongly oppose the right of individuals to own firearms, how would you rate Saxby Chambliss?

Strongly Support    1       2       3       4       5       6       7    Strongly Oppose

#### Demographics

Are you male or female? 1. Male 2. Female

What is your age?

Do you consider yourself to be?

1. White
2. Black/African American
3. Hispanic/Latino
4. Asian
5. Native American
6. Indian
7. Other

You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation.

## **Survey Instrument #2**

### Pretest – Political Awareness

Some people constantly follow politics, while others aren't that interested in it. How interested are you in politics?

1. Very interested
2. Interested
3. Not interested
4. Not interested at all

What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi currently hold?

1. Treasury Secretary
2. Senate Majority Leader
3. Speaker of the House
4. Secretary of State
5. Supreme Court Justice

What are the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution called?

1. Articles of Confederation
2. Declaration of Independence
3. Bill of Rights
4. States Rights
5. Federalist Papers

What is the term in years of a U.S. Senator?

1. 2
2. 3
3. 4
4. 5
5. 6

What is the name of the current Senate Majority Leader?

1. Trent Lott
2. Nancy Pelosi
3. John Roberts
4. Harry Reid
5. Newt Gingrich

### Religion

On the following scale, how important is religion in your life?

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Indifferent
4. Unimportant
5. Very Unimportant



Which pair of terms below best describes your religious views?

1. Fundamentalist/Evangelical
2. Traditional/Conservative
3. Mainline/Moderate
4. Progressive/Liberal
5. Not religious

Which statement best describes your view of religious tradition?

1. We should strive to preserve beliefs and practices
2. We should strive to adapt beliefs and practices to new times
3. We should strive to adopt new beliefs and practices
4. Don't believe in religion

Which of the following best describes how often you pray?

1. Never
2. Less than once a month
3. About once a month
4. About once a week
5. About once a day
6. Multiple times a day

Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the Bible?

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word.
3. The Bible is a book of fables written by men and is not the word of God.

How certain is your belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God

How often do you attend religious services?

1. More than once a week
2. Once a week
3. Once or twice a month
4. A few times a year
5. Once a year or less
6. Never

What is your religion?

1. Baptist—any denomination
2. Protestant (e.g., Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal)
3. Catholic
4. Mormon
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Hindu
8. Buddhist
9. Pentecostal
10. Eastern Orthodox
11. Other Christian
12. Other non-Christian
13. None

**PID**

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a:

1. Strong Republican
2. Not Strong Republican
3. Leans Republican
4. Undecided/Independent/Other
5. Leans Democrat
6. Not Strong Democrat
7. Strong Democrat

In general, do you think of yourself as:

1. Extremely liberal
2. Liberal
3. Slightly liberal
4. Moderate, middle of the road
5. Slightly conservative
6. Conservative
7. Extremely conservative

**Posttest**

Did you see the video?

1. Yes
2. No

**Manipulation Check**

Which of the following statements best describes the video clip you viewed?

1. A political advertisement about Barack Obama
2. A political advertisement about Saxby Chambliss
3. A political advertisement about John McCain
4. A political advertisement about Elizabeth Dole

### Traits

Thinking about Saxby Chambliss, in your opinion how well does the term {QUALIFIED; MORAL; DISHONEST; STRONG} describe Saxby Chambliss?

1. Extremely well
2. Fairly Well
3. No opinion
4. Not too well
5. Not well at all

### General Evaluation

On a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 means “dislike very much” and 100 means “like very much,” how much do you like Saxby Chambliss?

### Vote

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “not likely at all” and 10 means “very likely,” how likely is it you would vote for Saxby Chambliss if you could?

### Proximity

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: Saxby Chambliss shares my political views.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: Saxby Chambliss shares my religious views.

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly Disagree

You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation.

### Survey Instrument #3

#### Pretest – Political Awareness

Some people constantly follow politics, while others aren't that interested in it. How interested are you in politics?

1. Not interested at all
2. Not Interested
3. Somewhat Interested
4. Very interested

How closely do you pay attention to what is going on in government and politics?

1. Not closely at all
2. Not Very Closely
3. Closely
4. Very Closely

What job or political office does Joe Biden currently hold?

1. Senate Majority Leader
2. Speaker of the House
3. Vice President
4. Secretary of State
5. Chief Justice

What job or political office does Bobby Jindal currently hold?

1. Senator
2. Attorney General
3. Vice President
4. Governor
5. Secretary of Defense

What are the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution called?

- 1 Articles of Confederation
- 2 Declaration of Independence
- 3 Bill of Rights
- 4 States Rights
- 5 Federalist Papers

How long is the term of a U.S. Senator?

1. 2 years
2. 3 years
3. 4 years
4. 5 years
5. 6 years

What is the name of the current Senate Majority Leader?

1. Dick Cheney
2. Barack Obama
3. John Boehner
4. Margaret Thatcher
5. Harry Reid

Thinking about the issue of abortion, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly pro choice and 7 representing strongly pro life, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Pro Choice    1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Pro Life

Thinking about the issue of legalizing gay marriage, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support legalizing gay marriage and 7 representing strongly oppose legalizing gay marriage, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of stem cell research, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support government funding of stem cell research and 7 representing strongly oppose government funding of stem cell research, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Support       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the issue of school prayer, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose prayer in school and 7 representing strongly support prayer in school, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Oppose       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Support

Thinking about the issue of posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities and 7 representing strongly support posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Oppose       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Support

Thinking about the issue of individual gun rights, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose the right of individuals to own firearms and 7 representing strongly support the right of individuals to own firearms, how would you rate yourself?

Strongly Oppose       1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Support

### PID

Thinking about your political ideology, please rate yourself on the following scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means very liberal and 7 means very conservative.

Very Liberal    1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very Conservative

In terms of your political party affiliation, how would you describe yourself on the following scale, where 1 means strong Democrat and 7 means strong Republican?

Strong Democrat    1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strong Republican

When supporting a candidate, how important is it that a candidate share your political views?

1. Not Important at All
2. Very Unimportant
3. Neither Important nor Unimportant
4. Very Important
5. Extremely Important

### Religion

When supporting a candidate, how important is it that a candidate share your religious views?

1. Not Important at All
2. Very Unimportant
3. Neither Important nor Unimportant
4. Very Important
5. Extremely Important

How important is it that political officials hold strong religious beliefs?

1. Not Important at All
2. Very Unimportant
3. Neither Important nor Unimportant
4. Very Important
5. Extremely Important

Thinking about your religion, do you consider yourself to be?

1. Mainline Protestant
2. Evangelical Protestant
3. Unaffiliated/Non-denominational Protestant
4. Black Protestant
5. Roman Catholic
6. Jewish
7. Muslim
8. Not religious
9. Other

Thinking about religion, how important would you say religion is in your life?

1. Not Important at All
2. Very Unimportant
3. Neither Important nor Unimportant
4. Very Important
5. Extremely Important

Which pair of terms below best describes your religious views?

1. Fundamentalist/Evangelical
2. Traditional/Conservative
3. Mainline/Moderate
4. Progressive/Liberal
5. Not religious

Which of the following statements best describes your view of religious tradition?

1. We should strive to preserve beliefs and practices
2. We should strive to adapt beliefs and practices to new times.
3. We should strive to adopt new beliefs and practices.
4. Don't believe in religion

Which of the following best describes how often you attend church or a place of worship?

1. Never
2. Only for holidays, funerals or weddings
3. About once a month
4. About once a week
5. Multiple times a week

Which of the following best describes how often you pray?

1. Never
2. Less than once a month
3. Once a month
4. 2-3 times a month
5. Once a week
5. 2-3 times a week
6. Daily

Which of the following best describes how often you read the Bible?

1. Never
2. Less than once a month
3. Once a month
4. 2-3 times a month
5. Once a week
5. 2-3 times a week
6. Daily

Which of the following best describes how often you take part in activities of a church or place of worship other than attending service?

1. Never
2. Less than once a month
3. Once a month
4. 2-3 times a month
5. Once a week
5. 2-3 times a week

Which of the following statements best describes your feelings about the Bible?

1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally.
3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God.

How certain is your belief in God?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in God

How certain is your belief in heaven?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in Heaven

How certain is your belief in the devil?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in the devil

How certain is your belief in hell?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe in hell

How certain is your belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

1. Absolutely certain
2. Fairly certain
3. Not certain
4. Not certain at all
5. I do not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God

### **Posttest**

Did you have any problem viewing the ad? 1. Yes 2. No

Were you able to hear the ad? 1. Yes 2. No

### Manipulation Check

Which of the following best describes this ad?

1. It was an attack ad for Nancy Pelosi for Senate.
2. It was an ad for Barack Obama for President.
3. It was a values ad for {INSERT CANDIDATE} for {INSERT OFFICE}.
4. It was an ad about dependence on foreign oil.



### Traits

We will now ask you a few questions about how well certain terms describe \_\_\_\_\_. Thinking about {INSERT CANDIDATE NAME}, how well does the term {WISE; FRIENDLY; SINCERE; MORAL; STRONG; UNQUALIFIED; UNINTELLIGENT; IRRESPONSIBLE; DISHONEST; UNCARING} describe {INSERT CANDIDATE NAME}?

1. Not well at all
2. Not too well
3. Fairly well
4. Extremely well

### Affect

Thinking about Saxby Chambliss, does \_\_\_\_\_ make you feel HOPEFUL?

1. Not hopeful at all
2. Not very hopeful
3. Fairly hopeful
4. Extremely hopeful

Does \_\_\_\_\_ make you feel ANGRY?

1. Extremely angry
2. Fairly angry
3. Not very angry
4. Not angry at all

Does \_\_\_\_\_ make you feel PROUD?

1. Not proud at all
2. Not very proud
3. Fairly proud
4. Extremely proud

Does \_\_\_\_\_ make you feel DISAPPOINTED?

1. Extremely disappointed
2. Fairly disappointed
3. Not very disappointed
4. Not disappointed at all

### General Evaluations

On a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates "very negative" and 100 indicates "very positive," how would you rate your feelings toward Saxby Chambliss?

On a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates "dislike very much" and 100 indicates "like very much," how would you rate how much you like Saxby Chambliss?

### Competency

Thinking about \_\_\_\_\_, how competent do you think \_\_\_\_\_ would be in dealing with {ECONOMIC; HEALTH CARE; FOREIGN POLICY; EDUCATION; SOCIAL} issues?

1. Extremely incompetent
2. Fairly incompetent
3. Fairly competent
4. Extremely competent

### Motivation, Vote, Proximity

If \_\_\_\_\_ were running for office in your state, how motivated would you be to actively campaign for \_\_\_\_\_?

1. Not motivated at all
2. Not very motivated
3. Undecided
4. Fairly motivated
5. Very motivated

If \_\_\_\_\_ were running for office in your state, how likely would you be to put a \_\_\_\_\_ bumper sticker on your car or place a \_\_\_\_\_ sign in your yard?

1. Very Unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Undecided
4. Likely
5. Very Likely

Regardless if you plan to vote, if you could, how likely would you be to vote for \_\_\_\_\_?

1. Very Unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Undecided
4. Likely
5. Very Likely

How much do you agree with the statement: \_\_\_\_\_ shares my political views.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: \_\_\_\_\_ shares my religious views.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree or Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

### Candidate PID

Thinking about the political ideology of Saxby Chambliss, on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being very liberal and 7 very conservative, where would you place Saxby Chambliss?

Very Liberal    1        2        3        4        5        6        7        Very Conservative

Thinking about the partisanship of \_\_\_\_\_, would you say he is a:

1. Strong Republican
2. Weak Republican
3. Strong Democrat
4. Weak Democrat
5. Independent
6. Libertarian
7. Other

### Candidate religion

How important is it that public officials rely on their religious beliefs to guide their decisions?

1. Not at all important
2. Very unimportant
3. Neither important nor unimportant
4. Very important
5. Extremely important

How much do you think \_\_\_\_\_ relies on his religious beliefs in making decisions?

1. Not at all
2. Not very much
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat
5. Very much

### Religious Guidance

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about political ISSUES?

1. Not at all    2. Not very much    3. Neutral    4. Somewhat    5. Very much

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about political CANDIDATES?

1. Not at all    2. Not very much    3. Neutral    4. Somewhat    5. Very much

How much do you rely on religion to guide how you think about PUBLIC OFFICIALS?

1. Not at all    2. Not very much    3. Neutral    4. Somewhat    5. Very much

Most people rely on their religious beliefs in forming their political decisions.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

### Public Religion

How much do you agree with the statement: Organized religious groups should stand up for their beliefs in politics.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: Public funding should be available to churches and houses of worship to provide social services for the needy?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: Local communities should be allowed to post the Ten Commandments and other religious symbols in public buildings if the majority agree?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: There should be daily prayer in all public schools?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

How much do you agree with the statement: Organized religious groups of all kinds should stay out of politics?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

### Candidate Issues

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of abortion, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly pro choice and 7 representing strongly pro life, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Pro Choice   1       2       3       4       5       6       7 Strongly Pro Life

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of legalizing gay marriage, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support legalizing gay marriage and 7 representing strongly oppose legalizing gay marriage, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Support      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of stem cell research, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly support government funding of stem cell research and 7 representing strongly oppose government funding of stem cell research, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Support      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      Strongly Oppose

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of school prayer, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose prayer in school and 7 representing strongly support prayer in school, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Oppose      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      Strongly Support

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities and 7 representing strongly support posting the Ten Commandments in government facilities, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Oppose      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      Strongly Support

Thinking about the \_\_\_\_\_ commercial you just watched and the issue of individual gun rights, on the following scale, with 1 representing strongly oppose the right of individuals to own firearms and 7 representing strongly support the right of individuals to own firearms, how would you rate \_\_\_\_\_?

Strongly Oppose      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      Strongly Support

#### Demographics

Are you male or female? 1. Male 2. Female

What is your age?

Do you consider yourself to be?

1. White
2. Black/African American
3. Hispanic/Latino
4. Asian
5. Native American
6. Indian
7. Other

You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation.

## **VITA**

Raised in Southwest Missouri, Matthew Thornton earned his Master of Arts in journalism from the Walter Williams School of Journalism at the University of Missouri – Columbia. Prior to his studies at MU, Thornton attended the Sam Walton School of Business at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration with a specialization in Retail Marketing Management. While at LSU, Thornton has taught courses on political communication, public relations, media law and news reporting and editing. His research focuses on political communication with emphasis on campaigns and strategy and the First Amendment.